

**BYZANTIUM AND ISLAM (9<sup>th</sup>.-10<sup>th</sup>. centuries)**  
**A HISTORICAL EVALUATION OF THE ROLE OF**  
**RELIGION IN BYZANTINE-MUSLIM RELATIONS**

by

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to examine and evaluate the religious aspects of Byzantine-Muslim relations from 843 to 1025 AD.

**Chapter I** is a general introduction to the early encounters between Islam and Christianity generally, and between Byzantium and Islam in particular. **Chapter 2:** provides a general survey of the religious themes of the Byzantine-Muslim relations, such as Jihad, the role of Muslim clerics in the Byzantine-Muslim struggle and the impact of religion on trade and diplomacy. **Chapter 3:** examines the fate of ethnic minorities between the two powers. This includes the prisoners of war, who, in most cases, spent several years in the hands of their enemies, as well as captive children and slave women. Renegades and apostates will be studied among the ethnic minorities. **Chapter 4:** is a historical evaluation of the Byzantine anti-Islamic polemic. Each individual work is examined and compared with other Byzantine sources together with any repercussions or cross-influences on the Muslim sources. **Chapter 5:** is a review of all the Muslim polemical works which were related more or less to the Byzantine-Muslim struggle. There were a considerable number of Muslim theologians who were totally aware of the Byzantine polemic and the religious controversies and paid special attention to refuting the Byzantine claims and to counter-attacking the writings and propaganda of the Byzantine theologians.

**Chapter 6:** This chapter aims to elucidate and examine the main general themes of the Byzantine-Muslim polemic and to shed light on its peculiar features within the wider context of Christian-Muslim polemic.

# Dedication

To

Imān, Aḥmed and Heshām

My family

## Notes on transliteration

I have chosen the method of the Encyclopaedia of Islam with a few alterations, according to the style applied by most contemporary British scholars<sup>1</sup>. That is J instead of Dj for ج, and Q instead of K for ق.

ء	'	ز	z	ق	Q	Long vowels		Diphthongs	
ب	b	س	s	ك	k	اى	ā	و	aw
ت	t	ش	sh	ل	l	و'	ū	ي	ay
ث	th	ص	ṣ	م	m	ي	ī		
ج	J	ض	ḍ	ن	n	Short vowels			
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ه	h	-	a		
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	w	'	u		
د	d	ع	‘	ي	y	-	i		
ذ	dh	غ	gh						
ر	r	ف	f						

Of course, in the bibliography and footnotes I have reproduced the exact forms used by the editors, publishers or translators of the Arabic books.

As for as concerns Greek names I have employed the forms used by the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*.

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<sup>1</sup> - Among those names, W. M. Watt, H. Kennedy, C. E. Bosworth and M. A. Shaban.

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## List of Abbreviations

AB	Analecta Bollandiana
ABSA	Annual of the British School at Athens
AHR	American Historical Review
B	Byzantion
BASOR	Bulletin of the American School of the Oriental Research
BGA	Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum
BMGS	Byzantine and Modern Greek studies
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
BS	Byzantinoslavica
BZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
CBHB	Corpus Bruxellense Historiae Byzantinae
CE	Coptic Encyclopaedia
CISC	Corpus Islamo-Christianum
CRAI	Comptes-rendues des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
DK	Der Katholik. Mainz
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
ECQ	Eastern Church Quarterly
EI	Encyclopaedia of Islam (New Edition)
EO	Echos d'Orient
GOTH	Greek Orthodox theological review
HSR	Dialogos/ Hellenic Studies Review
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUS	Harvard Ukrainian Studies
ICMR	Islam and Christian-Muslim relations
JEH	The Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JNES	Journal of the Near Eastern Studies
JESHO	Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient

JSAI	Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam
JS	Journal Asiatique
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
PG	J.P. Migne, Patrologia series Graeco-Latina
PL	J.P. Migne, Patrologia series Latina
MW	Moslem World
n. d. or s.d.	No date
NTT	Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift
OC	Oriens Christianus
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
ODB	Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
POC	Proche-Orient Chrétien
PBR	The Patristic and Byzantine review
RAO	Recueil d'archéologie orientale
REB	Revue des études byzantines
RH	Revue historique
RHR	Revue de l'histoire des religions
RSBS	Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi
RSO	Rivista degli Etudes Islamiques
SA	Studia Arabica
SI	Studia Islamica
SO	Studia Orientalia
SPBS	Society for promotion of Byzantine studies
SK	Seminarium Kondakaovinium
TM	Travaux et Mémoires
TZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
ZMR	Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft und religionswissenschaft
ZRVI	Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta

# Introduction

In an Indian story, a father and a son were confronting each other in a long standing dispute. The father drew a number 9 in the sand, and asked his son “Do you see what I drew now? You see it as 6, and I see it as 9. From your place you will never perceive what I see, and neither will I ever perceive what you see”, This simple story has a striking similarity to the Muslim-Christian dialogue through the centuries, when each side worshipped God on its own terms and often judged its foe’s religion on the basis of his own view and perception.

Religion has played a crucial role in human history, not only in the daily life of people within their political boundaries, but also in the relations between different states and cultures. It was, and remains, the pretext for war, a motive for fighting, a consolation in turmoil, and the means of cheer at times of victory. Soldiers, as well as ordinary people, pray for support and victory. Sacred books and objects are a spiritual support in the baggage of many soldiers. In international relations, ethnic minorities and their treatment still attract outside intervention or attention. Ethnic minorities are often the first to suffer in most internal and international conflicts.

In modern times, the historical misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians over issues of creed still exists. Contradictions between religion and politics remain deeply problematic and often dangerous, leaving an impact on the lives of millions. Unfortunately, in the name of religion, some appalling crimes of ethnic cleansing or terrorism still blindly batter innocent people in different places of the world. Although the role of religion in political relations has declined compared with

the middle ages, the medieval patterns of polemic and propaganda are still widely employed and *a fortiori* are taking advantage of the mass media revolution of our times.

Undoubtedly, religion deeply coloured life in the medieval world, and had a greater impact than now in all its aspects; accordingly its effects covered a wide range of the internal and external affairs of both Byzantium and caliphates. This thesis aims to illustrate and examine the role of religion in Byzantine-Muslim relations, and its effect on military-politico affairs. In other words, it will examine the religious aspects of these relations through two centuries (843-1025), not only in the polemical texts but also in every aspect of the relations between Byzantium and the Muslim powers in the east Mediterranean.

These particular time boundaries (843-1025) delimit an important period in the history of the east Mediterranean, when the caliphate had passed climax and had begun to decline slowly and steadily. Henceforth, the balance of power turned to the Byzantine side. At the same time, Muslim and Christian theologians became more acquainted with the creeds of each other. The Bible was made available in Arabic, and presumably a Greek translation of the Qur'ān was available in Byzantium. This coincided with the climax of Arabic philosophy (Kalām).

This study begins by considering the early religious encounters between the Muslims and the Byzantines, and the religious and spiritual character of the whole relationship between the two worlds will be elucidated. Second, there will be an analytical study of Byzantine anti-Islamic writings. As far as the Muslim texts are concerned, a selected group of them, particularly those which bear the peculiar feature of Byzantine-Muslim polemic, will be examined.

My main aim in this thesis is beyond the scope of a mere theological study; mainly it is historical and I will focus on the religious characteristics of Byzantine-Muslim relations, within the historical context, and in the light of the military and political relations. This will provide a means of eliciting Byzantine attitudes towards Islam in:

- Byzantine literature.
- Byzantine liturgical documents.
- Byzantine diplomacy.
- The Byzantine court.

This will broadly connect between the two major contexts, Byzantium and Muslim world through their relations in the area of religion, within two wider contexts, Byzantine-Muslim politico-military struggle on one side and the Muslim-Christian polemic on the other. One has to limit one's discussions to what has a direct connection with the Byzantine-Muslim relations, and what is the unique and genuine character of their polemic. For instance, the issue of the Trinity was and still remain one of the main themes of Muslim-Christian polemic, and almost endless literature was dedicated to it. *Ipsa facto* Byzantine-Muslim theologians were no exception. One may suppose within the scope of this thesis, it would be almost pointless to devote a large part to simply discussing a theological issue, when after all it is not peculiar to the context chosen here. Similarly, there is no need, one may think, to re-examine and discuss in detail all the military clashes over the borders, as this would require a separate thesis, if not more. In sum, only the employments and effects of religion in these skirmishes are my scope here.

The main method of this thesis is to trace as many effects as possible of religion in every aspect of the relations between Byzantium and its Muslims neighbours in the eastern Mediterranean, that is to say, to investigate the military and political context in the light of the polemic, and vice versa. This will require the examination of a huge number of sources, in literature, history and theology, each with its own character and background. The wider view to be gained studying all these sharply different sources, will, it is hoped, produce a coherent study able to shed intensive light on an old topic from a new window, and certainly within a new approach.

In fact, Byzantine-Muslim relations have been studied by several scholars, but the religious scope of these relations still need further investigation. Some valuable contributions have been made,<sup>2</sup> but there are still several gaps to be filled, as the majority of these works stand on theological ground, and almost ignore the military struggle, while others limit their efforts to one particular author or text. At the same time, some of the modern scholars appear not to have an accurate knowledge of the Arabic language or of Islam; consequently they follow Byzantine writers in their misunderstanding of some Arabic words. Although some of them make considerable efforts to correct the Byzantine mistakes in the Arabic language, there is yet more to be done.

For example, in his book about St. John of Damascus on Islam, D. Sahas translates and comments on the text of Chapter 101, which is ascribed to John of Damascus. The author of the text, whether he was John of Damascus or not, made some simple mistakes in the Arabic language, and misunderstood some basic Islamic rites. In this text:

"These, then, were idolaters and they venerated the morning star and Aphrodite, whom notably they called Habar (Χαβαρ), which means great<sup>3</sup>.... This, then, which they call "stone", is the head of Aphrodite, whom they used to venerate and whom they called Haber<sup>4</sup>"

The author seemed to be confused between several Arabic words,<sup>5</sup> but such grave mistakes could hardly have been expected from someone who worked in the government of four caliphs. Such simple mistakes in the Arabic language create deep doubt as to the authenticity of this work, and even give support to the possibility that it is a latter interpolation. The same criteria could be applied to other works attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah.

Furthermore, some of the modern researchers on the Byzantine-Muslim polemic are more Byzantine in their sympathies or their misunderstanding of the Arabic language than the original Byzantines.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> - For example, A. Khoury, D. Sahas, S.H. Griffith and A. Abel. See Bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> -John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, PG 94, cols. 769. English trans, D. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of Ishmaelites"*, (Leiden 1972) Appendix 1, pp. 132-141.

<sup>4</sup> -John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, PG 94, col. 769, ed. with a parallel German trans. Gleis and Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodore Abū Qurrah, Schriften zum Islam*, CISC, Series Graeca 3 (Würzburg 1995) p. 78. English trans. D. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 137.

<sup>5</sup> - For a full discussion of this text see infra, pp. 88-92.

<sup>6</sup> - There are several examples. F. Nau in his comments on the dialogue between the patriarch John and a certain Muslim emir absolutely fails to show any academic neutrality. M. F Nau, 'Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens', *JS*, IIe serie 5 (1915) pp. 225-279. English translation in: N.A. Newman (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue: a collection of documents from the first three Islamic centuries (632-900)*, translations with commentary, Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute (Hatfield, Pennsylvania, 1993) pp.7-47. In particular p. 244 (p. 21 of the English translation) in which he says "On a voulu laver sa mémoire de ce dernier forfait qui n'est pas unique dans l'histoire de l'islamisme". That is to say, "one wanted to cleanse his memory of such abominable crimes, which are not unique in the history of Islam".

Another example is when Migne, J. Demetriades and A. Khoury examined the text of Niketas of Byzantium, in which the latter alters the Qurā'nic verse (2: 186) to show that the Muslims were allowed to eat any kind of animals, even dogs and wolves. These modern scholars either failed to refer to the correct verse, or when they did, they ignored the alteration made by Niketas, but gave



More important some significant Arabic sources have not so far been used in this context. Though al-Jāḥiẓ is well known by western scholars and his treatise against Christianity has been translated into English, his encyclopaedia of zoology with its important allusions has never been utilized in Byzantine-Muslim studies. His colleague Mu'tazilī al-Qāḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār, is less fortunate, inasmuch as he has had no attention from modern Byzantinists, notwithstanding his extremely important allusions to some social and religious aspects of the Byzantine-Muslim struggle in the tenth century. Similarly, al-Baqillānī, the only Muslim polemicist, to my knowledge, who visited Constantinople and debated with the Byzantine clergy, has not been used sufficiently.<sup>7</sup> His alleged debate with the emperor Basil II on some religious issues has never been used or translated into any modern European languages.

This thesis will be divided as follows:

The recent section contains:

- Introduction.
- Analytical study of the research sources.

This will be an examination of the different sources, their nature, problems and the importance of each of them in the scheme of this dissertation.

**Chapter I** is a general historical introduction to the early encounters between Islam and Christianity generally, and between Byzantium and Islam in particular. Some of the

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their readers the impression of translating the text correctly. Ironically, when Niketas of Byzantium translates accurately, J. Demetriades gives the text another and different purpose and completely alters the meaning. See *infra*, Chapter 4, p. 229.

<sup>7</sup> - A. Khoury does use only one of his books.

early polemical texts will be examined and some of the early features of the polemical texts will be traced.

**Chapter 2:** provides a general survey of the religious themes of the Byzantine-Muslim relations, such as Jihad, the role of Muslim clerics in the Byzantine-Muslim struggle and the impact of religion on trade and diplomacy.

**Chapter 3:** examines the fate of ethnic minorities between the two powers. This includes the prisoners of war, who, in most cases, spent several years in the hands of their enemies, as well as captive children, slave girls and Christian Arabs. Renegades and apostates will be studied among the ethnic minorities.

**Chapter 4:** is a historical evaluation of the Byzantine anti-Islamic polemic. Each individual work will be examined and compared with other Byzantine sources together with any repercussions or cross-influences on the Muslim sources.

**Chapter 5:** is a review of all the Muslim polemical works which were related more or less to the Byzantine-Muslim struggle. Although the main stream of Muslim polemic was only a part of the internal controversies within the boundaries of the realm of Islam, there was a considerable number of Muslim theologians who were totally aware of the Byzantine polemic and the religious controversies and paid special attention to refuting the Byzantine claims and to counter-attacking the writings and propaganda of the Byzantine theologians.

**Chapter 6:** This chapter aims to elucidate and examine the main general themes of the Byzantine-Muslim polemic and to shed light on its peculiar features within the wider context of Christian-Muslim polemic.

The appendix contains an English translation of extracts form *Tathbīn dalā'il al-mubīwah* of al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār.

## The sources

As has been stated, the aim of this thesis is to examine and evaluate the religious aspects of Byzantine-Muslim relations from 843 to 1025 AD. I have limited my discussions to the Orthodox Muslims (Sunni) and Orthodox Christians (i.e. Chalcedonian works), with a limited survey of other Christian sources, Arabic, Armenian and Syrian. Religious issues in this historical context involve an examination of a wider range of materials, not only the polemical texts but also historical, geographical and hagiographical texts, as well as other literary material such as poetry and sermons.

With such a range of material one confronts varied problems. Medieval writers were not often keen to write about the religious identity, life or practices of those of other cultures. For the Byzantines, it was enough for them merely to refer to Muslims, as *barbarians* or *sons of Hagar*, with no consideration or attention to their religion. In addition, it is almost impossible to find information in the sources about public attitudes toward Islam or Muslims. Hagiography is a valuable source of religious life but, as Vasiliev pointed out, the hagiographers used to “intermingle reality with fantasy, historical facts with fairy tales”,<sup>1</sup> which was a consequence of the main aim of the writer, that is to glorify his saint.<sup>2</sup>

In any case, it is well known that, in both Byzantine and Islamic history, contemporary sources were being shared, and often copied, sometimes verbatim, by

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<sup>1</sup> - A. Vasiliev, 'The life of St. Theodore of Edessa', *B* 16 (1942-1943) p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> - See for instance the trip of Saint Constantine (Kiril), apostle of the Slavs, to Baghdad and his challenge to the Muslim thinkers in all the branches of knowledge at his time.

later historians. In some cases, the historians referred to their sources and scarcely made any comment on them. Mostly they quote at length, without reference to their source.

Some of the books were copied several times, mostly with additions or alterations from the later copiers. Presumably, the polemical texts would be vulnerable targets to such alteration. At the same time, other works are known to have been reproduced several times over the centuries and were accompanied by numerous amendments and alterations to the original text. Here, equally, the polemical texts seem especially vulnerable in this regard, and they often become the target of more blatant distortion. In addition, some of the active Arab authors modify their own books, which means that there are often several different copies of the book in existence. In the introduction to his book, Yaḥyā al-Antākī sheds valuable light upon this particular problem of the sources during his time.<sup>3</sup> The same warning concerning different versions or copies of the same work, even during the life of the author, was issued by al-Mas'ūdī.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, some of the most important sources are no longer extant, while there are many Arabic manuscripts still unpublished.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> - "I had finished this book ... but later I found some new narratives, which I had not seen in my first work, so I wrote all that and changed the whole book ... then again after moving to Antioch in 405H. ... I changed part of it ... I would like to explain this, in case different copies of this work should be found" Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Antākī, *Histoire de Yhaya ibn Sa'īd d'Antioch*, ed. with French translation, A. Vasiliev and I. Kratchkovsky, *PO* 18, p. 708.

<sup>4</sup> - Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-'ishrāf* (Beirut 1993) p. 363.

<sup>5</sup> - Most of the early Islamic anti Christianity polemic writings are still missing. E.g. the memories or records of al-Baqilānī of his trip to Constantinople, which would have provided some vital information on a direct polemical debate between Byzantine clerics and the Muslim theologian. There are more Muslim theologians whose works are lost, such as Ḍirār b. 'Amr al-Qādī (d. 806AD./ 190H. ) ; Abū Mūsa 'Isā al-Murdār (d. 840AD./ 225); Abū Haudhayl al-'Allāf (d. circa 840AD./ 225H.) Ḥafẓ al-Farḍ (IX century) al-Nāsī' al-Akbār, Abū al-'Aāas 'Abd Allah b. Muḥammad. Most of these previous writers are from the school of M'utzila. One can add also several works of al-Mas'ūdī, as he himself says in different pages of his book *al-Tanbīh*, see al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-'ishrāf*, passim; Caspar R. et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue Islamo-Chetien', *Islamochristiana* 1 (1975) pp. 142-152. It is noteworthy that some of these missing sources had come to light as fragments in the other works, such the polemical work of al-Kindī, which survive in a Christian refutation against it written by Yaḥyā b. 'Adī. Some of the Christian polemical works are missing also, or still unpublished manuscripts, such as the polemical work, which is attributed to Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Antākī. R. Gaspar et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue islamochrétien', *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976) p. 202; G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen*

The Muslim historian al-Mas'ūdī realised that the people of his time generally appreciated the earlier writers more than their own contemporaries. He reports that al-Jāhiz, the eminent Arab thinker, took this consideration seriously, and attributed some of his own writings to previous well-known writers and, surprisingly, they had a better reception. In contrary, when some of his excellent works appeared under his name, he received less appreciation.<sup>6</sup> This tendency, presumably, pushed some writers to attribute their treatises to already well-known writers. This is just one of many examples which can be cited in respect of the complexities in dealing with the sources and the context of their production.

Religious texts and polemical texts in particular raise a totally different issue and require careful examination. Polemical texts have particular features with regard to their target reader, their aim and style and finally the way in which they have been handled and used by later generations.

The polemical texts are usually intractable sources, inasmuch as they are mainly apologies, dialogues and arguments mostly ad hominem. Their grave lack of chronological data deeply complicated the task of the modern researcher to identify the missing author or date. Furthermore, every polemical work is a unique piece of literature; it has its particular characters and reflects the author's (or the later copier or even interpolator's) ideas and style. One can assume that the polemical works are more likely to be the suspect of interpolation or modification by later writers and copiers, because of their nature as defenders of belief. It would seem that a sense of religious duty impelled those late copiers to add their own modifications to such works if these

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*Literatur*, Città del Vaticano, 5 vols, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Studi e Testi (1944-1953) 2, p. 51; J. H. Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab chronicle (938-1034) of Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Antāki*, Ph.D. Thesis 2 vols, University of Michigan, (1977) a printed output of a microfilm by University Microfilms International, (Michigan, London 1979) I, p. 21

could make them appear more effective. There are even some cases of complete polemical works invented and attributed to well-known thinkers.

In the same way, it is safe to assume that the texts of the dialogues between different sides are usually completely different from what the real dialogues themselves must have been. One side wrote most of the text generally a certain time after the dialogue took place. The dialogues were mostly written by the interlocutor himself or later by his disciples. However, the personality, ability and answers of the interlocutor in the majority of these dialogues seem to be the target of the writer or the later copier. In some cases, the interlocutor is portrayed as simple-minded, anxious for knowledge rather than capable of challenge; he gives tailor-made questions, just to give the master more opportunities to refute them.<sup>7</sup> However, in the texts of dialogues there is an explicit tendency to put the interlocutor (or even create one) in a high position, possibly the caliph himself or some distinguished emir from the Muslim side<sup>8</sup> or a patriarch or a certain scholar from the Christian side,<sup>9</sup> so as to make the future victory (in the dialogue) look more decisive.

Biblical and Qur'ānic interpretations and quotations were used on both sides, in their writings, to defend their own belief and refute that of the other. These sacred books were the backbone at every stage in the polemical writings in both sides; they were the fixed, holy and unmistakable sources of every possible question. On the

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<sup>6</sup> - Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-ishrāf*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>7</sup> -See for example the portrait of the Muslim interlocutor in the dialogues attributed to John of Damascus, in which the Muslim asks and replies like a student anxious to learn, not a real foe.

<sup>8</sup> -See the dialogues with 'Amr b. al-'Aās, and the dialogue of Timothy with the caliph al-Mahdī, which clearly seem to be a later interpolation or at least modified in several ways; for the authenticity of these dialogues, see *Infra* Chapter I.

<sup>9</sup> -See Ibn Qayim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥyāra fī ajwibat al-Uhūd wa-l-Naṣāra*, (The guide for the confused in answering the Jews and Christians) ed. A. al-Saqā, (Cairo 1979) p. 225. Here he says he had a discussion with a very distinguished Christian 'ālim (scholar) presumably the patriarch. Similarly, the story of a certain Muslim prisoner of war who had a discussion with the patriarch of Constantinople. For this story, see *infra* Chapter 3, p. 102, note 230.

Muslim side, the Qur'ān set the guidelines to Muslim thinkers to call, preach, challenge and refute all other dogmas.

However, the Bible, of course, did not deal with Islam; hence it was a task for the Christian thinkers to find a Biblical exegesis for the phenomenon of Islam and what was more important, to find aid from the Bible in refuting and challenging the Muslim dogmas. Since Muslims were assured that the Bible had already foretold Muḥammad,<sup>10</sup> the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, became itself a polemical battlefield between the two sides. However, these sacred books are full of metaphorical stories and in a highly complicated linguistic style, and require caution. Accordingly they should be studied within their context.

## The Greek sources

Anti-Islamic polemic was evidently born and elaborated in the East, when the Christian thinkers in the seventh century faced the early waves of Muslim conquest and tried to find a Biblical exegesis for the phenomenon of Islam and Arabic victories, rather than writing a polemic against it.<sup>11</sup> Sophronios of Jerusalem in some of his sermons attempted to find a Biblical interpretation of the phenomenon of Islam. He saw this turmoil as God's punishment (of course temporary) of the Christians for their sins. His explanation reflects the first Christian understanding of Islam.<sup>12</sup> Anastasios of Sinai (d. after 700) showed a more direct approach and clearer understanding of Islam, with

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<sup>10</sup> -There are several verses in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, which were used and interpreted by Muslim theologians as prophecies for their prophet Muḥammad: Isaiah, 5: 26-30, 9:2-4, 21:1-10. 13-14, 24:16-18, 40:10-11; Genesis: 6:2; John 14:7,8,13,16,26; I Peter: 4:17. See U. Rubin, *The eye of the beholder: The life of Muhammad as viewed by the early Muslims: A textual analysis*, (Studies in late antiquity and early Islam, 5) (Darwin Press, Princeton 1995) pp. 21-44.

<sup>11</sup> - On the early Christian works about Islam, see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it: A survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam*, (New Jersey 1997) in which he dealt with each individual work.

<sup>12</sup> - Sophronios of Jerusalem, *Sermones*, PG 87, cols. 3201-364. See R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 67-73.



some allusions to the early debates between Muslims and Christians at the end of the seventh century.<sup>13</sup>

Other early texts allude to Islam accidentally within the context of the Arabic conquests. *Doctrina Jacobi*,<sup>14</sup> which is written around 646/647,<sup>15</sup> is one of the early texts which refers to Islam and Muḥammad. The explicit expression “Μὴ γὰρ προφηταὶ μετὰ ξίφους καὶ ἄρματος ἔρχονται”<sup>16</sup> lays the foundation of the Christian attitudes towards Muḥammad as a prophet and a statesman. The text reflects the repercussions and echoes of the advance of Islam and the different interpretations it received from Jews and Byzantines. The chronicle of John of Nikiu (7 c.), the Egyptian Coptic bishop,<sup>17</sup> gives a vivid portrait of the complex attitude of the local Egyptians towards their new masters, the Arabs.

Theophanes the Confessor (760-817) devotes a short passage in his chronicle<sup>18</sup> to Islam, its prophet and its origin, presumably using some oriental sources.

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<sup>13</sup> -J. Haldon, ‘The works of Anastasius of Sinai: A key source for the history of the seventh century east, Mediterranean society and belief’ in A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (eds.) *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East: Problems in the literary sources material*, papers in the First workshop on late antiquity and early Islam, no. I, I, pp. 107-147.

<sup>14</sup> -The text is a dialogue between some newly converted Jews in North Africa. The main character of the text is Jacob, a recent convert, who became a true Christian. Soon a new person, Justus, still a Jew, arrives from Palestine, and takes part in the dialogue; before long he delivers the news of a new prophet in Arabia. *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, ed. G. Dagron and V. Déroche ‘Juifs et Chrétiens dans l’orient du VIIe siècle’, *TM* 11(1991) Greek text and French trans. pp. 70-219; commentary, pp. 230-273. On this text, see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 55-61.

<sup>15</sup> -G. Dagron, ‘Doctrina Jacobi, commentaire’ *TM* 11 (1991) p. 247; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 58-59, notes 14, 15.

<sup>16</sup> - *Doctrina Jacobi*, p. 209.

<sup>17</sup> -Unfortunately, less is known about the life of John of Nikiu, who was an eyewitness of the Arabic conquest of Egypt. His city Nikius is now a tiny village in the Egyptian delta. He was a monk, then a patriarchal secretary for four Coptic patriarchs. His history survived only in an Ethiopian translation of an Arabic translation; both are from a missing Coptic or Greek text: I. H. al-Maṣrī, *Qisat al-Kinīṣah al-Maṣrīh* (the story of the Egyptian church) 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 2 (Cairo 1987) pp. 284-288.

<sup>18</sup> - Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor, 2 vols. (Leipzig 1883-1885) reprinted (Hildesheim 1963) I, pp. 33-336; English trans. *The chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern history*, trans. C. Mango and R. Scot (Oxford 1997) pp. 464-465; On Theophanes and his book, see G. Ostgorsky, ‘Die Chronologie des Theophanes im 7. Und 8. Jahrhundert’, *BNJ* 7 (1928/1929) pp. 1-56; H. Hunger, *Byzantinsches Handbuch*, I, pp. 334-339; C. Mango and R. Scott’s introduction to the English translation of the Chronicle of Theophanes, pp. XLIII-C. On the issue of the authenticity of the work, see C. Mango, ‘Who wrote the chronicle of Theophanes’,

These pages of Theophanes were used several times by other Byzantine writers. Similarly George Monachos<sup>19</sup> deals with Islam and Muḥammad briefly in his chronicle, in which he draws heavily on Theophanes, but his vehemence and combative language characterise his writings.

Byzantine hagiography provides a rich and abundant source of material for the religious life. In dealing with Byzantine Muslim warfare, there are quite a number of saints' vitas which give glimpses of information, especially the vitas and passions of those who had been killed by the Arabs. Yet these works mostly tend to exaggerate and mingle historical events with fantasy, but they are still a valuable source for the religious affairs of the Byzantine-Muslim relations.<sup>20</sup> The most important work of Byzantine hagiography is attributed to Evode<sup>21</sup> (d. 883), about whom we know almost nothing; he composed the vita and passions of 42 Byzantine prisoners who fell into Muslim hands and stayed in Iraq several years after the fall of Amorium. Later they were offered the chance to convert to Islam, but when they refused, they were executed and performed miracles after their death.<sup>22</sup>

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ZRV 18 (1978) pp. 578-587; On Theophanes' sources, see A. S. Proudfoot, 'The sources of Theophanes for the Heraclian dynasty', *B* 44 (1974) pp 367-439; E.W Brooks, 'The sources of Theophanes and the Syrac chroniclers', *BZ* 15 (1906) pp. 548 - 587.

<sup>19</sup> -Georgius Monachus, *Chronicon*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig 1904). On Hamartolos, see H. Hunger, *Byzantinisches Handbuch*, I, pp. 347-351; ODB, s.v. 'George Hamartolos'; C. Mango, 'The tradition of Byzantine chronography', *HUK* 12/13 (1988-1989) pp. 370-371.

<sup>20</sup> -There are several Vitas: Vita Euthymii patriarchae, two different versions of passions of 42 martyrs of Amorium, Vita St. Romanos, the new martyr, and vitas of some Byzantine holy women published recently by Talbot Rice, as *Holy women of Byzantium*. Similarly some other *non-Byzantine* hagiography, such as Vita Constantine (Methodius), which was composed by the Bulgarian writer Kliment Okhridski, sheds some light on Byzantine attitudes towards Islam.

<sup>21</sup> - A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam: texts et auteurs VIIe-XIIIe siècles* (Louvain-Paris 1969) p.164.

<sup>22</sup> - Evode, *Βίος και ἄθλησις τῶν ἀγίων τεσσαράκοντα δύο μαρτύων*. (Passions of the forty two martyrs of Amorium) *Acta Sanctorum*, mars 1 (Venice 1735) reprinted (Brussels 1966) pp. 887-893, Latin trans. pp. 460-466.

Halkin published another vita of these 42 Byzantines, in a text considerably different from Evode's.<sup>23</sup> Halkin does not indicate any author for his text, which seems to be anonymous. Evode composed other polemical works against Islam, which are not published yet.<sup>24</sup>

### **Niketas of Byzantium (c. 9<sup>th</sup>. century)**

The main Byzantine polemicist against Islam is Niketas of Byzantium.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, Niketas is one of the least known among Byzantine theological authors. There is no clear information about him in any contemporary source. In his works there is almost no chronological indication, no names and no dates, except for his two letters in answer to letters sent by Muslims, in which he says that these letters were sent to the emperor Michael, son of Theophilos. However, Demetriades in his thesis has argued that these two letters are fictitious, or at least belong to a later date, possibly the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the importance of Niketas' works, to my knowledge, he has never been mentioned in any other Byzantine source, and unfortunately never cared to say anything about his personal life.

Niketas's writings were a watershed in the Byzantine polemic against Islam. It started an era of comprehensive knowledge of Islam, and hence may infer that a Greek translation of the Qur'ān became available in Byzantium. It is no surprise that more accurate and elaborate works followed those of Niketas; among these is an anonymous

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<sup>23</sup> - F. Halkin, 'Passion inédite des Quarante-deux martyrs d'Amorium', no. 12 in idem, *Hagiologie Byzantine, textes inédite en grec et traduits en Français*, (Brussels 1986) Greek text pp. 152-161; French translation. 162-169.

<sup>24</sup> - *Chapitres de la fausse Ecriture de Muhammad* (MS - unpublished) Athos 1854. : Ms. unpublished (Escorial 459) Cod. Athos Laurae 1854; See A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 163-168; R. Caspar et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue Islamo-Chretien,' p. 172.

<sup>25</sup> - Niketas of Byzantium, *Confutatio falsi libri quem scripsit Mohamedes Arabs*, PG 105, cols. 669-805. See J. M. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium and his encounter with Islam: a study of the "Anatrophe" and the two "Epistles" to Islam*, Ph.D. Thesis (The Hartford Seminary Foundation 1972); A. Khoury. *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 110- 127; H. Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur*, p. 530.

treatise (10/11 C.) *Contra Mohammed*.<sup>27</sup> In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Euthymius Zygabenus<sup>28</sup> (11-12 century) composed his polemical work against Muslims, in which he seemingly draws on Nicetas of Byzantium.<sup>29</sup> Similarly Bartholomew of Edessa,<sup>30</sup> and Niketas Choniates<sup>31</sup> wrote similar polemical treatises against Islam, in which they follow the lead of Niketas. Bartholomew in particular is similar to Niketas in several respects. He shares with him a tendency to very vehement and offensive language against Islam and its prophet. Both men offer a very intensive and accurate knowledge of Islam, surprisingly combined with some grave mistakes in their understanding of Islam and Muslim rites. Finally, the chronological and biographical details of both of them are obscure, as no concrete evidence sheds any light on their life, either in their works or from any other source.

However, there are several other writers who offer some glimpses of Islam.<sup>32</sup> While the previous works were written within the Byzantine borders, there is a letter addressed to a certain Muslim emir, and attributed to Arethas of Caesarea.<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> - J. M. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 140.

<sup>27</sup> - PG 104, 1448 b- 1457 b.

<sup>28</sup> -On his life and works, see M. Jugie, 'Life and works of Zigabène Euthyme', *EO* 15 (1912) p. 215-225; H. Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur*, p. 614-616.

<sup>29</sup> -Zygabenus, Euthymius, *Adversus Saracenos*, PG 130, cols. 1332-1360; see also: A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 235-248; *ODB*, s.v., 'Euthymios Zigabenos'

<sup>30</sup> - Bartholomew of Edessa, *Elenchus et Confutatio Agareni*, PG 104, 1384-1458; ed with parallel German trans. Klaus-Peter Todt, (Altenberge 1988). See A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam*, pp. 259-293; A. Abel, 'La refutation d'un Agarène de Barthélémy d'Edesse', *SI* (1973) 5-26; H. Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur*, p. 531.

<sup>31</sup> -Niketas Acominatus (Choniates), *Thesaurus Orthodoxae Fidei*, PG 140, 105-121. See A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 248-258; F. Cavallera, 'Le Trésor de la Foi orthodoxe de Nicétas Acominatos Choniate' *Bulletin de Littérature ecclésiastique* 5 (1913) pp. 124-137.

<sup>32</sup> -Among these works: John Doxopatre (11<sup>th</sup>.C.) who wrote a missing treatise against Islam. See K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinische Literatur*, 2 vols. (New York 1970) I, p. 462. Also Michael Psellos on his *De Omnifaria doctrina*; Anna Comnena, *Aléxiad*, ed. B. Leib, II: 10, p. 208; Zonaras, *Ioannis Zonarae historiarum libri XIII usque ad XVII*, ed. Th., Büttner-Wobst (CSHB) (Bonn 1897) pp. 214-215 (PG. 134, cols. 1285-1288) and Theodore Balsamon, *Canons, canon 84*, on the baptism of Muslim children, PG 137, 793-797).

<sup>33</sup> -Archbishop of Caesarea, theologian and writer, flourished in the reign of Leo VI, died after 932. For a full discussion about his life and works, see S. Kougeas, 'Ο Καισαρείας Ἀρέθας καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ' (Athens 1913); P. Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism: the first phase, notes and remarks on education and culture in Byzantium from its origins to 10<sup>th</sup> century*, English trans. H. Lindsay

letter, however, survives in one single Greek MS. in Moscow.<sup>34</sup> The background to this letter is complex and it is internally contradictory, thus the authenticity and contents are still open to question.<sup>35</sup>

Byzantine military texts provide good material concerning Muslims, the enemies of the empire. For most the main concern was confined to the battlefield, but others were well acquainted with Muslims, not only their military tactics, but also their religion and its connection with their warfare. Furthermore, they deal with some unique points, scarcely treated in other sources, for instance, the prisoners of war, the deserters and the importance of religion, not only in rising the morale of soldiers and seeking divine support, but also in propaganda and for recruitment of more volunteers in the armies. Luckily, there are several military treatises which were compiled in the tenth and eleventh centuries,<sup>36</sup> some of which provide texts of some imperial decrees concerning Muslims who stayed in Byzantium.

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and A. Moffatt, *Byzantina Australiensia* 3 (Canberra 1986). pp. 237-280; H. Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur*, pp. 591-594; *ODB*, s.v., 'Arethas of Casarea',.

<sup>34</sup> -The editio princeps of the letter was published by Popov, *Emperor Leo VI the wise and his reign* (in Russian) (Moscow 1892) pp. 296-304. Later it was re-edited with an English introduction by P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas' letter to the emir at Damascus', *B* 29-30 (1959-1960) pp. 293-302. Re-edited within collection of Arethas' works, *Scripta minora*, 2 vols, ed. L. G. Westerink (Leipzig 1968/72). (The letter to the Muslim emir, pp. 233-245); French translation, A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas' à l'Emir de Damas' *B*, 24, (1954), 343-370; on this letter, see A Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 219-226; R. Jenkins, 'Leo Choerosphactes and Saracen Vizier', no XI in *idem*, *Studies on Byzantine history*. He attributed the letter to Leo Choerosphactes but this was challenged by P. Karlin-Hayter 'Arethas Choerosphactes and the Saracen Vizier', no. IX in *idem*, *Studies in Byzantine political history* (London 1981); D. Sahas, 'Arethas' 'Letter to the Emir at Damascus': Official or popular views on Islam in the 10th century Byzantium? ', *PBR* 3 (1984) 69-81.

<sup>35</sup> - See *infra* Chapter 4, pp. 241-247.

<sup>36</sup> -There are several military texts, most of them are published. Among the most important works are the works of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas, *De velitatione/ Skirmishing*, and *Praecepta militaria*. Similarly, Kekaumenos the Byzantine general in the east, and Nikephoros Uranos both composed important military works. Nikephoros Phokas, *De velitatione*, ed. and French trans. *Le traité sur la guerilla (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicephore Phocas (963-969) texte établi Gilbert Dagron et Haralambie Mihaescu; traduction et commentaire G. Dagron.* (Paris 1986) series: *Le Monde byzantin*; Nikephoros Phokas, *Praecepta militaria* English trans., Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the 10th Century*, (Washington, DC; Dumbarton Oaks; 1995) pp. 3-59 (text) pp. 61-78.

Some Byzantine emperors had literary ability, and they produced some important treatises, mostly concerning state affairs, the army, or sermons. The Emperor Leo VI, (886 - 912) in his *Tactica*<sup>37</sup> alluded not only to the Muslims' tactics but also to their religion and its impact on the battlefield.

The letters of the Byzantine emperors, patriarchs, and officials are a first-class source of information. Although these letters often present a personal view, they deal with points seldom revealed by historians. Among these documents, is a letter of the emperor John Tzimiskes (969- 976) addressed to King Ashot III of Armenia, concerning his war against the Muslims,<sup>38</sup> albeit with some exaggeration and boastfulness. The letter bears an unmistakable crusading spirit against the Muslims. The emperor vows to retake the Christian holy places in Jerusalem. Significantly, it also reveals his aim to obtain as many as possible of the sacred relics from the East.

Leo Choerosphactes<sup>39</sup> was a Byzantine ambassador to both the 'Abbasid and Bulgarian courts. He certainly had several meetings with Arab emirs and thinkers in the Abbasid court. Unfortunately the correspondence of Leo does not give many details about his personal experiences in Baghdad.

## The Arabic sources

The Qur'ān is the Muslims' sacred book. It was revealed in instalments to Muḥammad through the angel Gabriel. During the life of the prophet, Muslims used to memorise the verses once they were unveiled to him. Later the Qur'ān was collected in

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<sup>37</sup> -Leo (VI) *Leonis imperatoris tactica*, PG 107, cols 672-1120; the allusions to Islam, cols 972 b-d, 976 c-d.

<sup>38</sup> -The text of the letter is in: Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the crusades, tenth to twelfth centuries, the chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, English trans. A.E. Dostorian (University Press of America, Lanham, New York 1993) pp. 29-33.

one single volume, then distributed to all the parts of Muslim caliphate.<sup>40</sup> The Qur'ān is the main source for the Muslim creed as well as its polemic; it is the first Muslim polemical text, and the master guide for Muslim thinkers in their challenges to Christian polemics. It is noteworthy that the Qur'ān in its dealing with the Christians deals with that task gradually and in different stages, each different in tone, style and attitude. At the same time, the Qur'ān gives a glimpse of the life of the Arabs before Islam and the early years of Muslim history.<sup>41</sup>

The second source for the Islamic creed is Ḥadīth. Ḥadīth is every saying, piece of advice, command, and guidance given by the prophet Muḥammad. Furthermore, it also includes every act or practice he himself performed in his private or public life, even the way he used to dress or eat, as well as every act performed by others which he approved, praised or recommended.<sup>42</sup> Unlike the Qur'ān there was no official policy<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> -Leo Choerosphactes, *Léon Choerosphacté magistre, proconsul et patrice: Biographie-correspondance* (texte et Traduction) (Athens 1939) *Texte und Forschungen zur Byzantinisch-Neugriechischen Philologie*. N. 31.

<sup>40</sup> -According to several Muslim narratives, there were some writers of the Qur'ān during the life of the prophet, but obviously the work was not completed at this early stage, and the main way of preserving it was in the memory of the early Muslims. A few years after Muḥammad's death, during the reign of Abū Bakr, the first Muslim caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭāb, the future second Muslim caliph realised that most of those who had memorised the Qur'ān directly from the prophet had killed in the war against the renegade Arab tribes. 'Umar was obsessed about the fate of the Qur'ān, so he advised the caliph to write down the text from the memory of all those who were still alive. Abū Bakr soon issue the order to collect, confirm and write down a master copy of the Qur'ān, which was kept in his house, and later moved to the house of his successor 'Umar I. In the reign of 'Uṭhmān, the third Muslim caliph, the Islamic empire expanded from beyond Iran till the north Africa and Spain, and there were several copies or fragments of the Qur'ān. 'Uṭhmān recalled the master copy from 'Umar's house and had several copies made from it, then distributed them to all parts of the state, with definite orders to destroy any other copies. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, pp. 24-25.

The Qur'ān has been translated and published in almost all modern languages. It is agreed in the modern Islamic world that the most authorised English translation is that of 'Abudllah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The meaning of the illustrious Qur'ān*, (Lahore 1971). However, there are innumerable writings on the Qur'ān in almost all the modern European languages. See in particular the works of W. M. Watt. For a bibliography of the recent works see M. A. Usmani, *Literature on Quran in English language: a bibliography*, (Karachi, Pakistan n.d.)

<sup>41</sup> - On the Qur'ān as a historical source, see A. Siddiqi, *The Qur'ānic concept of history* (Islamabad 1993).

<sup>42</sup> - On the problem of definition of the Ḥadīth, See I. Fawzī, *Tadwīn al-Sunnah* (The Documentation of Suannah, Hadith) (London 1994) pp. 29-36.

of collecting and examining the authenticity of the Ḥadīth, and it was kept alive in the memory of Muslims, till they developed a systematic way of collecting and confirming it.<sup>44</sup> In the third century pioneer works began to collect and examine thousands of narratives attributed to the prophet. By the end of the third Muslim century there was a list of standard Ḥadīth collections<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, a large number of narratives were attributed to the prophet for political and religious or other reasons.<sup>46</sup> However, Ḥadīth can be considered as a second Muslim polemical text. The personal life of the prophet was the material of the most of the Christian polemical texts. Ḥadīth collections are a first-class historical source, reflecting explicitly the daily life of early Muslim society.

As far as Byzantium is concerned, there are some apocalyptic Ḥadīths attributed to Muḥammad, in which he prophesied that Muslims would take control of Constantinople. These Ḥadīths, as Canard pointed out, were used to encourage the soldiers in the war against Byzantium.<sup>47</sup> In the tenth century when Ṭarsūs played a crucial role in Muslim-Byzantine warfare, several traditions appeared which praise the

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<sup>43</sup> - This could be explained in the light of some Ḥadīths attributed to the prophet in which he recommended writing only the Qur'ān from him. "Do not write anything from me except the Qur'ān" Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, III, 12.

<sup>44</sup> -The Muslim method of confirmation of Ḥadīth is called Isnād, which consists of a chain of narrators, beginning with the person who saw or heard the prophet, and transferred the account of this Ḥadīth to others. The creditability of the first witness and, subsequently of each one in the whole chain, is the evidence of confirmation of the whole Ḥadīth. The same chain was used first in the early historical works, but gradually Muslim historians have omitted it.

<sup>45</sup> -The main collections of Ḥadīth are these 6 books: Saḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī, (d. 870 A.D./ 256 A.H.); Saḥīḥ of Muslim, (d. 875A.D/ 261A.H.); Sunan of Abū Dāwūd, (d. 890A.D./ 276 A.H.); Sunan of Ibn Mājah: (d. 887A.D. /273 A.H.); Jāmi' of al-Tirmidhī, (d.893 A.D./ 279 A.H.); Sunān of al-Nisā'i, (d. 916 A.D./303 A.H). For a full bibliography on the Ḥadīth literature, see M. Anees et. al., *A Guide to Sira and Hadith literature in western languages*, (London 1986) pp. 205-295. On the beginnings of writing the Ḥadīth, see I. Fawwzī, *Tadwīn al-Sunnah*, (The Documentation of Sunnah, Hadith) pp. 145-169.

<sup>46</sup> -The best example of these fictitious narratives attributed to the prophet is a Ḥadīth which was circulated in the reign of al-M'utṣim that the prophet explained the verse "the cursed tree in the Qur'an" 17:60, as the Umayyad family. Al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-khulafā'*, (history of the caliphs) p. 271.

<sup>47</sup> -M. Canard, 'Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople dans l'histoire et dans la légende', *JS* 208, (1926) pp. 105-112, reprinted in idem, *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*.



city and its fighters, and encouraged Muslims to support it, if not dedicating themselves to saving such a God-protected city.

### The correspondences between Leo III and 'Umar II

On both sides, 'Umar II b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and Leo III, were pious reformers. As for 'Umar II, he was unusual phenomenon among the Umayyad caliphs, who lived a luxurious and worldly life. At the same time, he was keen to restore the supposed humility and piety of the Muslim caliph.

'Umar II and Leo III exchanged polemical letters in which both refute the other's arguments and defend their own faith. While some sources confirm such a correspondence between the two rulers,<sup>48</sup> the authenticity of the surviving texts of the letters, though they are published several times in several versions, is still under discussion among modern scholars who tend to consider them as a later interpolation and date them around the end of the ninth century.<sup>49</sup> The current available texts may be summarised as follows:

- An Armenian text inserted by Ghevond the Armenian historian in his history. The text consists of a drastically abbreviated copy of 'Umar's letter (2 pages), and a lengthy letter of Leo (50) pages.<sup>50</sup> While Beck<sup>51</sup> and Jeffery<sup>52</sup> assume that there was

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<sup>48</sup> - In the biography of 'Umar II, there are allusions to correspondences between 'Umar and Leo concerning the condition of a certain Muslim prisoner of war. Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Sīrat 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz*, (Biography of 'Umar II b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, ed. A. 'Abīd, (Cairo 1927) p. 175; Similarly, Muḥammad b. al-Mubarrad (the Arab grammarian d. 898 A.D/ 285 A.H) in his linguistic book *al-Kāmil*, confirms the exchange of messages between the two men. Al-Mubarrad, *al-kāmil*, ed. W. Wright (Leipzig 1864) pp. 295-296. The explicit reference to the polemical nature of the letters is mentioned by Agabius, the Arab Melkite writer. Agabius, *Kitāb al-'Unwān* (Histoire Universelle) ed. and trans. A. Vasiliev. PO 8 (Paris 1909) p. 503.

<sup>49</sup> -M. Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar'; H. G. Beck, *Kirche und Theologishce Literatur*, p. 338; S. Gero, *Byzantine iconoclasm during the reign of Leo III*, pp. 44-48, 153-172; A. Houry, *Les théologienes byzantins*, pp.200- 218; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 490-501.

<sup>50</sup> - Ghevond, *Histoire des guerres et des conquêtes des Arab en Arménie*, trans. G.V. Chahnazarian, (Paris 1856). pp. 40-97; English trans., A. Jeffery, 'Ghevond's text: The letters of 'Umar to Leo' *HTR* 37 (1944) pp. 277- 332

<sup>51</sup> - H. Beck, 'Vorsehung und Vorherbestimmung in der theologischen Literatur der Byzatiner' *OCA* 114 (1937) p. 44.

an existing Greek original of this Armenian text, their theory was challenged by Gero, who presumes that the text was originally written in Armenian.

- A Latin text,<sup>53</sup> which Gaudeul convincingly argues is a rather “simple draft drawn up much later probably in western milieu” since it implies the Latin filioque.<sup>54</sup>
- A partial Arabic anonymous version, considered by some modern scholars as ‘Umar’s reply.’<sup>55</sup>
- An *Aliamiado* text in Arabic script but using Romance dialect, which is a version of ‘Umar’s reply found among other polemical works within a manuscript in the national library of Madrid (BNM. N. 4944) and translated into French in a Ph.D thesis in Montpellier.<sup>56</sup>
- Finally, a re-constructed artificial copy of the missing letter of ‘Umar’s, the text of which Gaudeul tried to reconstruct using both the anonymous Arabic version and the *Aliamiado* text, conjecturing with the quotations in Leo’s letter of the original Muslim letter, now missing.<sup>57</sup>

### The letter of caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd to the emperor Constantine VI

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<sup>52</sup> - A. Jeffery, ‘Ghevond’s text’, p. 274.

<sup>53</sup> - Simphoriani de triplici disciplina cuius partes sunt: *Philosophia naturalis, Medicina, Theologia moralis, Philosophia*, (Lyons 1508); reprinted, *PG* 107, cols. 315-324. See S. Gero, *Byzantine iconoclasm during the reign of Leo III, with particular attention to the oriental sources*, CSCO 346, Subsidia, 41 (Louvain 1973) pp.154-161. He argues that the whole Latin text is a genuine late work representing the western tradition (e.g. the filioque) and could not be, at any rate, a translation of an original letter.

<sup>54</sup> - M. Gaudeul, ‘The Correspondence between Leo and ‘Umar: ‘Umar’s letter re-discovered’ *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984) p. 116. (Filioque lit. “and – from- the son”. It is an expression was added by the Latin Church in the third Council of Toledo in 589, to refer to the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son as well. ODB, S.V. filioque.

<sup>55</sup> - D. Sourdel, ‘Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d’époque ‘Abbaside contre les chrétiens’, ed. and French trans. *REI* 34 (1966) p. 29, partial English trans. M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & clashes: Islam and Christianity*, pp.40-53

<sup>56</sup> - D. Cardalliac, *La polémique anti-Chrétienne du manuscrit aljamiado n. 4944 de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Madrid* (Ph.D. Thesis 2 vols, Université de Paul Valéry (Montpellier 1972)

<sup>57</sup> - M. Gaudeul, ‘The Correspondence between Leo and ‘Umar: ‘Umar’s letter re-discovered’ *Islamochristiana*, 10 (1984) pp. 109-157.

This document has had scant attention from modern scholars. It was published in Egypt in the Arabic language several times, and published recently with a French translation.<sup>58</sup> The letter is the first fully authentic encounter between Muslims and Byzantines in the religious context. The author tries to argue with the emperor and refute the Christian creeds using quotations from the Bible, but overall, his knowledge of the Christian book is not comparable to that of the late Muslim theologians. However, the letter rejects and refutes some of the early Christian objections against Islam.

## Islamic polemic

### Al-Ṭabarī, ‘Alī b. Rabban’<sup>59</sup> (c. 855 A.D.)

He is a newly converted Muslim doctor. There is some confusion about the name of his father.<sup>60</sup> ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī was one of the members of the ‘Abbasid court during the reign of al-Mu‘taṣim and al-Mutawakil. The book of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī was part of the new anti-Christian policy of the caliph, al-Mutawakil. He himself states this clearly in his introduction.<sup>61</sup> Although, his arguments are far from the rational style of other Muslim thinkers, that is the Mu‘tazilah School in Iraq, and other Muslim

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<sup>58</sup> - Ibn Abi al-Laith, *Lettre du Calife Hârûn al-Rasîd à l'empereur Constantine VII*, (Arabic text and French translation) trans. Hadi Eid (Paris 1992).

<sup>59</sup> - ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla fī ithbāt nubuwwat al-nabi Muḥammad* (The book of religion and empire in the confirmation of the prophethood of the prophet Muḥammad) ed. A. Mingana, (Cairo 1923), English trans. A. Mingana (Manchester, 1922) reprinted in N. Newman (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue: A collection of documents from the first three Islamic centuries (632-900 AD) translations with commentary*, Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, (Hatfield, Pennsylvania, 1993) pp. 547-684.

<sup>60</sup> - Ibn al-Nadīm says about him “Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Sahl al-Ṭabarī, was a writer of al-Maziar b. Karin. When he converted to Islam by al-Mu‘taṣim, the latter bestowed him a high position. Al-Mutawakil made him one of his confidants” Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, p. 296; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, Aḥmed b. al-Qāsim (d. 1270/668), *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqā al-aṭbbā’*, ed. N. Riḍā, (Dar Maktabit al-Ḥayāh, Beirut, n.d.) p. 414; al-Ṭabarī, *Tā’rīkh*, III, 2, p. 1283; See also the introduction by A. Mingana to the book of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī; EIs (new edition) art ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, ‘Alī b. Rabban’,

<sup>61</sup> - ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, p. 8.

theologians who contributed effectively to Muslim-Christian polemic, nevertheless, his contribution to Muslim polemic is substantial, inasmuch as he used his knowledge as a former Christian to introduce the Bible in detail to the Muslim reader.

**Al-Jāḥiẓ (the exophthalmic), Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr b. Baḥr (d. 869 A.D./ 255H.)** He is one of the leading Arab thinkers of all time. He wrote several works on various different topics; he has a unique ability “to write any thing about any topic”.<sup>62</sup> Al-Mas‘ūdi criticised him bitterly and accused him of writing in several contradictory directions, even against his belief as a thinker of Mu‘tazilah<sup>63</sup> School.<sup>64</sup>

Al-Jāḥiẓ, a prolific writer, composed various works,<sup>65</sup> of which two merit special attention. One is his short and extremely important treatise against Christians.<sup>66</sup> It was a part of the state propaganda under the caliph al-Mutawakil, but at the same time, reflects the moderate attitude of the man and his school, al-Mu‘tazilah, towards

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<sup>62</sup> - J. Finkel, Introduction, reprinted N. Newman, *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, p. 693.

<sup>63</sup> - Al-Mu‘tazilah is an Arabic word meaning ‘withdrawers’. The Arabic sources narrate a story of the establishment of this school and the origin of this epithet. They say that, in a class of Imām al-Ḥāssan al-Bāṣrī, a leading Muslim thinker, a question was asked about the salvation of a grave sinner. Soon, a quarrel occurred between the teacher and one of his pupils, Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’. The angry disciple moved aside, and the Imām said “ Wāṣil has withdrawn from us”. Whatever the authenticity of such story, the new doctrine appeared and formed an essential part of Muslim culture. The active new school was established and flourished mainly in Baṣra (southern Iraq) and Baghdad. It gave the Muslim world a large number of great thinkers. The main teachings of this school could be summarised under five main points (al-Uṣūl al-khamsah). 1- The oneness of God and denying the attribution of any human adjectives to him. He is the eternal and the oldest, and whatever else is new and created (including the Qur’ān and Jesus). 2- The promise and threat that God will fulfil his promise and threat, and will not forgive the sinner unless he, viz. the sinner regrets. 3- Al-‘adl (justice), that God creates human being but not their deeds. That is to say, every human is able to decide what to do by his free will, not according to his predestination. 4- The salvation of the sinner, and he will be neither Muslim nor non-Muslims. 5- enjoying what is just, and forbidding evil acts. ‘Abd al-Jabār al-Qādi, *Sharḥ al-aṣūl al-khamsah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm, (Cairo 1956); al-Mas‘ūdi, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 3, pp. 210-214; see M. A. Mir Valiuddin, ‘Mu‘tazilism’ in: M. M. Sharif, (ed.) *A history of Muslim philosophy*, pp. 199-220.

<sup>64</sup> - Al-Mas‘ūdi, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 3, p. 226.

<sup>65</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, in his introduction to his great encyclopaedia of zoology *al-Ḥayawān*, listed his various writings; see al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān* (The animal), (Cairo 1905) I, pp. 4-6.

<sup>66</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Thalāth rasā’il li Abī ‘Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ: al-radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, ed. J. Finkel, 2 nd. ed. (Cairo 1963) English translation of his treatise against Christianity, J. Finkel, *A risala of al-Jāḥiẓ*, reprinted N.A Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, pp. 685-719. On al-Jāḥiẓ, see C. Pellat, ‘Christologie ḡāhizienne’ *SI*, 31 (1970) pp. 219-232, reprinted in idem: *Etudes sur l’histoire socio-culturelle de l’Islam (VIIe-XVe)*; Idem, *al-Gāhiz, les nations civilisées et les croyances religieuses*. Variorum (London 1976)

Christians and explicitly indicates the spiritual disharmony of the Muslim empire in his time. The other work of interest is his great encyclopaedia about animals, in which he summarised the zoological knowledge of the Arabs. In this book he discusses the castration of animals, then moves to subject of eunuchs, and accuses the Byzantines of being ruthless and kidnapping Muslim children in order to castrate them. His wide interests cover several aspects of his society; he was interested in animals, slave girls, the singular odd groups in society, such as eunuchs and misers, and anti-Arab movements as well as jinn and Arabic myths. This wide ranging of knowledge puts him in the elite among the Arabic writers and thinkers of all times.

**Al-Māturīdī**, (d. 944-333H.) He is the thinker of *Ahl al-Sunnah*, the Orthodox Muslims. He and his school, which was named after him, contributed to the controversies between the different Muslim sects in his time. He devoted a small part of his works to the anti-Christian polemic.<sup>67</sup> On the contrary, ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Qāḍī **Abū al-Ḥassan al-Hamadḥānī** (d.1025/ 415) was the master of the famous school of al-Mu’tazila and composed several philosophical religious works.<sup>68</sup> In them, he paid close attention to the Byzantine victories in the tenth century and their impact on Christian-Muslim polemic.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> -Al-Māturīdī, *kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (The book of the oneness) ed. F. Kholif (Beirut 1970). On his life and works, see Kholif’s introduction to the previous book, pp. 1-21; D. Thomas, ‘Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī on the divinity of Jesus Christ’, *Islamochristiana*, 23 (1997) pp. 43-64; H. Özcan, ‘Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī religious pluralism’, *Islamochristiana*, 23 (1997) pp. 65-80.

<sup>68</sup> - *Al-mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa al-‘adl*, 20 vols, only 14 of which were found and published by several Egyptian scholars under the supervision of the late Tahā Ḥusayn (Cairo 1957-1962); *Taḥbīr dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, (confirmation of prophethood), 2 vols. ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm, (Beirut 1966); partial English translation with comments, S. M Stern, ‘Quotations from apocryphal Gospels in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’, *JTS* 18 (1967) pp. 34-57; idem, ‘‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account of how Christ’s religion was falsified by the adoption of Roman customs’, *JTS* 19 (1968) pp. 128-185. On his attitude to free will, see R. M. Frank, ‘The autonomy of the human agent in the teachings of ‘Abd al-Ġabbar’, *Le Muséon* 95 (1982) pp. 323-355.

<sup>69</sup> - This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

**Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī** Muḥammad b. ‘Alī (d. 975-976 / 365 H).<sup>70</sup>

When the Abbasid caliphate was on the wane and unable to maintain or even support the Jihad against Byzantium, public feeling in the Islamic world was still in favour of the idea of Jihad. Far away from Baghdad, a city of wealth and corruption in the tenth century, the voluntaries in Khurasān came along to take part in the struggle. Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī was a religious man who played a significant role in this Khurasānite movement. He was simply the “advocator of the religion by the sword and pen”.<sup>71</sup> Among his several works is a long polemical poem which he wrote while he was in Asia Minor fighting with Muslim armies. The poem, consisting of 74 verses<sup>72</sup> is extremely important. One can say that every verse in this unique poem reflects historical and religious aspects of the context of Byzantine-Muslim relations. It deals with a wide range of polemical and political issues.

**Al-Bāqillānī**, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib (d. 1013/403) is the only Muslim apologist to have faced a Byzantine emperor in Constantinople.<sup>73</sup> As a member of the Ash‘ari sect (the orthodox Muslims), he contributed to large-scale religious debates. He was a prolific writer; most of his writings were directed in defence of Islam and the Orthodox Muslim sect (ahl al-Sunnah). His first book is *Kitāb al-Tāmhīd* (the

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<sup>70</sup> - Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. ‘Ismā‘īl al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, his family name al-Qaffāl is an Arabic word meaning lock-maker. Apparently, most of his family were specialists in this work. He was one of the Muslim leaders in Khurasān. Al-Subkī, says he was a Mu‘tzilite, then returned to the Orthodox Muslims, and became one of the Shafiites. His date of death may be one of two dates 336 H. or 365 A. H. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyyah al-kubrā* (The grand classes of Shafiitism) 6 vols. in 3 parts (Cairo – n.d.) 2, p. 178; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah fī mulūk miṣr wa al-Qāhirah* (the bright stars on the kings of Egypt and Cairo) 16 parts in 9 vols. (Cairo 1963) 3, p. 296; 4, p. 265.

<sup>71</sup> -Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyyah*, 2, p. 176.

<sup>72</sup> -The poem was published with a German translation by G. V Grünebaum from an Arabic Ms in Vienna, while a slightly different version was preserved by al-Subkī. C.f. G. Grünebaum, ‘Eine poetische Polemik, pp. 50- 53; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyyah*, pp. 181-184.

<sup>73</sup> - Around 982 he was sent by ‘Aḍad al-Dāwlah (the Daylamite Būyids de facto ruler in Baghdad) on an embassy to the emperor Basil II. Al-Khaṭīb al-Bghdādī narrates that the emperor tried to force the Muslim scholar to kiss the ground, or at least kneel before him, but the Muslim cleric refused.

introduction), in which he devotes a part to refuting Christian dogmas, and the authenticity of the Bible.<sup>74</sup> It is noteworthy that the main obsession of al-Bāqillānī was defending the Qur'ān and confirming its authenticity, which generally put him in the situation of defending the Qur'ān against the polemics of non-Muslims as well as the so-called Muslim heretical of free thinkers. His twelve known works are devoted mostly to this aim.<sup>75</sup>

**Ibn Ḥazm, Muḥammad (348/7 H. / 994- 418 H. / 1027?)**

Ibn Ḥazm was born and lived in the cultural milieu of Spain (al-Andalus); he is one of the Muslim theologians who devoted most of his writings to defending Islam and refuting non-Muslim polemic. Ibn Ḥazm was a prolific writer, covering a wide area of Islamic culture, but his masterpiece is an encyclopaedia of religions and sects,<sup>76</sup> in which he displays and refutes most of the known non-Islamic dogmas. He examines all the sects which he considers to be non-pure and hence heretical (or at least, which stray from Orthodox Islam) and refutes their teachings, using logical discussion and quotations from the Qur'ān.<sup>77</sup>

As for Christianity, he shows a good and solid knowledge of the Christian dogma. At the same time, he tried to use logical means and avoids frequent quotations from the

Al-Khaṭīb al-Bghdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād* (history of the city of Baghdad) 12 vols. (Cairo 1931) 5, p. 379.

<sup>74</sup> -Al-Baqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tāmhīd*, ed. R. J. McCarthy, (Beirut 1957). See A. Abel, 'le chapitre sur le christianisme dans le "Tāmhīd" d'al-Bāqillānī' *Études d'orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*, I (Paris 1962) pp. 1-11; A. Bouamama, *La littérature polémique musulmanisme*, pp. 106-107

<sup>75</sup> -Al-Bāqillānī, *al-'intiṣār li al-Qur'ān* (Justice to the Qur'ān) a photocopy of the manuscript with an introduction. F. Sezgin, publications of the Institute for the history of Arabic-Islamic Science (Frankfurt 1986). On al-Bāqillānī and list of his works, see F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, 9 Vols. (Leiden 1967). I, pp. 608-610; A. Bouamama, *La littérature polémique musulmane contre le christianisme depuis ses origines jusqu'au XIIIe siècle*, (Algeria 1988) pp. 106-108.

<sup>76</sup> -Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal fī al-milal wa-l-ahwā' wa-l-niḥal* (The final word on religions, inclinations and sects) 5 parts, in 3 vols. (Cairo 1899- 1904).

<sup>77</sup> - This attitude of course made him vulnerable to a bitter attack from some Muslim thinkers, who did not accept his views. See for example, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'īyyah*, 2, p. 43.

Qur'ān. He devotes the second volume of his book to an intensive discussion of the Bible, mainly the New Testament.<sup>78</sup> The other work of Ibn Ḥazm, which is related directly to the Byzantine-Muslim polemic, is his long poem refuting the one sent by the emperor Nikephoros Phokas.<sup>79</sup> Ibn Ḥazm's reply is one of two Islamic poems written to challenge the Byzantine threat. Both poems are slightly different in several respects. In chapter 5 of this thesis I discuss these poems in the full context of Byzantine-Muslim polemic.

These selected Muslim polemical works have been chosen inasmuch as they are related in one way or another, to the Muslim-Byzantine context. At the same time there is an enormous number of other works,<sup>80</sup> which lie beyond the scope of this current work, but nevertheless will be consulted whenever appropriate.

### Arabic historiography

In the ninth century Arabic historical writings reached a climax. Yet the oral tradition, mainly poetry, and the traditional *Isnād*, was still widely practised. Several historical written works began to appear following the pioneer work of Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq (d. 150 H. / 767 A.D.)<sup>81</sup> of a biography of the prophet.<sup>82</sup> The vivid and rich historical materials on Byzantine-Muslim relations provided by Muslim historians seem to be disappointingly reduced when dealing with questions of religion and polemic.

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<sup>78</sup> -Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, 2 pp. 59-66; on Ibn Ḥazm and his works, see A. Bouamama, *La littérature polémique musulmane*, pp. 52-106.

<sup>79</sup> - Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'īyyah*, 2, pp. 184-189; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-nihāya*, 11, 247-252.

<sup>80</sup> - For a full list of the Muslim polemical works against Christianity, see R. Caspar et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien', pp. 142-152; 2 (1976) pp. 190-194.

<sup>81</sup> -Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq, was one of the second generation after the death of the prophet. He lived in Medina. He wrote several works, but the main one is the life of the prophet. However Ibn al-Nadīm, a late Muslim writer criticises him bitterly and accuses him of quoting from Christian and Jewish sources, of admiring them as the first people of science. Furthermore he suspects the authenticity of Ibn Ishāq's sources and his witnesses, especially in poetry and genealogy. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 92.

<sup>82</sup> -Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allah* (The life of Muhammad) trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford University Press, 1990).



**Al-Balādhurī, Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā** (d. 892 AD/ 279 H.) composed a work on the Muslim conquests;<sup>83</sup> significantly he omitted some of the long chains of authorities. He offers some useful glimpses on the first stages of the relations between Muslim armies and the Christian population in Syria and Egypt. **Al-Ya‘qūbī, Aḥmad b. Ishāq** (d. 292 H. / 905 Ad.)<sup>84</sup> composed an annual chronicle, which ended in the year 872.<sup>85</sup> His other work is the *kitāb al-Buldān*, in which he deals briefly with the Byzantine army and the Byzantine-Muslim borders.<sup>86</sup> However, he mentions that he has devoted a special book to Byzantium, its lands, army and men, which is missing.<sup>87</sup>

**Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr** (225-310 H. / 840-922 AD).<sup>88</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī simply is the master of all the Muslim historians; his works extend from the religious to historical topics. His great chronicle *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*<sup>89</sup> covers the beginning of creation until 915 AD / 303 H. His other main work is his great *Tafsīr* of the Qur’ān (explanation of the Qur’ān).<sup>90</sup> There is also a relatively unknown short treatise on the family of Muḥammad and his early disciples. It is called *al-Muntakhab min kitāb dhayl al-mudhayl min tārīkh al-ṣahābah wa al-ṭabi‘īn*,<sup>91</sup> in which he deals

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<sup>83</sup> -Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān lil-Imām Abi al-Ḥasan al-Balādhurī*, ed. R. M. Raḍwān (Beirut 1991) English trans. *The origins of the Islamic state*, P. Hitti (Beirut 1966).

<sup>84</sup> -On his life and writings, see the intensive study of Y. al-Ja‘fari, *al-Ya‘qūbī al-Mu‘rikh wa al-Jughrāfī* (al-Ya‘qūbī, the historian and geographical), (Baghdad 1980). He pays special attention to a comparison between al-Ya‘qūbī’s contribution to Arabic geographical knowledge and most of the other writers.

<sup>85</sup> - Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, ed. T. Houtsma, 2 vols (Leiden 1883)

<sup>86</sup> - Al-Ya‘qūbī, *kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. De. Goeje, BGA VII (Leiden 1892).

<sup>87</sup> - Al-Ya‘qūbī, *kitāb al-Buldān*, p. 323.

<sup>88</sup> -Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, born in Āmel in 839 A.D /224 or 225 H., travelled around the Muslim lands seeking knowledge. He studied the Arabic language, the Qur’ān, and poetry. On the life and works of al-Ṭabarī, see Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kamil fī al-tārīkh* (The perfect in the history) 10 vols. (Beirut 1980-1981) 6, pp. 170-171; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, pp. 234-235. See F Rosenthal, The life and the works of al-Ṭabarī, in vol. I, of his translation of, *The history of al-Ṭabarī*, I, pp. 5- 134 (State University of New York Press, 1989)

<sup>89</sup> -Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk* (History of the prophets and the kings) ed. M.J. de Goeje, 15 vols. (Leiden 1879-1901)

<sup>90</sup> - C.f. A. Charfi, ‘Christianity in the Qur’ān commentary of al-Ṭabarī’, *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980) pp. 105- 148.

<sup>91</sup> - Ed. De Goeje, as a continuation of al-Ṭabarī great history (Leiden 1890)

with the controversial marriage of Muḥammad with Zaynab b. Jaḥsh, the former wife of his adopted son, Zayd b. Ḥārithah. Surprisingly, al-Ṭabarī seems to be totally unaware of any Christian polemic against this particular marriage. He simply and honestly records the narratives and views of the Muslim authorities, with few personal comments. In a word, he offers more abundant materials on the Byzantine-Muslim conflict but nevertheless his approach to the religious aspects of this conflict is rather vague and cursory.

Abū ‘Amr ‘Uṭhmān al-Ṭarsūsī’.<sup>92</sup> Although being a local historian, his memories of his city Ṭarsūs are extremely important to the study of the Byzantine-Muslim relations in the tenth century. He offers first-hand information and an eyewitness account of the city, its walls, fortifications, population and more important the local military religious organizations of the city and their connection with the city’s clerics and mosque. His lively account records in detail the nature of the life of the Muslim volunteers, their original cities, and their clerics; furthermore he alludes to the Greek and Armenian populations near the city and their uniquely peaceful relations with this Muslim military base.

Significantly, he records honestly several narratives attributed to the prophet and other early Muslim authorities, on the city of Ṭarsūs and its virtues (manaqib). These traditions seem to be introduced specially to promote the Muslim jihad in the absence of formal efforts from the incompetent caliphs. Although his book as a whole is missing, the surviving fragments published by I. ‘Abbās are still of great importance.

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<sup>92</sup> -I. ‘Abbās, (ed.) *Shadharāt min kutub mafqūdah fī al-tārīkh*, (Beirut 1988) pp. 37-48, 437-459; partial English trans, C. E. Bosworth, ‘Abū ‘Amr ‘Uṭhmān al-Ṭarsūsī’s *Siyar al-Thughūr* and the last years of the Arab rule in Tarsus (Fourth/Tenth century)’, no. XV in idem, *The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran*.

Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345 or 346 / 956) is a prolific Arab writer, who made wide contributions to all known branches of knowledge in his time.<sup>93</sup> In his thirty books, he covers various topics from astrology, geography and religion to the history of his time.<sup>94</sup> He divided his material between his books, and frequently refers his reader (often confusingly) to more information in this book or that. Unfortunately most of his books are lost but the surviving ones are still of great value for studying Byzantine-Muslim relations.

He was interested in religions and religious debates; we know that he composed at least three books on religions,<sup>95</sup> which are missing. His main surviving work is *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, in which he put a large collection of items of news, stories, geographical accounts and some scientific topics from astrology, philosophy, religion and medicine. He was well acquainted with the events of his time, knew several languages and had travelled for several years. He had also read most of the Arab Christian writers, especially the historians, such as al-Manbajī and Ibn al-Baṭrīq, and he engaged in several arguments with Christian thinkers, even in the churches in Iraq.<sup>96</sup>

Ibn Miskawayh,<sup>97</sup> (d. 1030/ 421 H) presents a new series of local chronicles. Ibn Miskawayh was secretary and librarian in the Daylamite administration. His position

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<sup>93</sup> -About al-Mas'ūdī, see Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 3, pp. 315-316; A. Shboul, *al-Mas'udi & his world: A Muslim humanist and his interest in non-Muslims*, (Ithaca Press 1979).

<sup>94</sup> -Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-Jawhr*, 4 vols. ed. K. A. al-Rifā'i, (Beirut 1989). pp. 12-13.

<sup>95</sup> -He frequently refers to his others works. The first work he called "al-mqālāt fī auṣūl al-diyānāt" (A treatise on the origins of religion). The second, "sir al-Ḥyāt" (the secret of life), and the third called "al-'ibānah fī auṣūl al-dyānh" (the explanation of the origins of religions). Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-ishrāf*, p. 322, passim.

<sup>96</sup> - Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-ishrāf*, p. 148.

<sup>97</sup> -Ibn Miskawayh, Abū 'Alī Aḥmed b. Muḥammad, a writer in the service of the Daylamite Būids, the Shiite powerful family in Baghdad. Ibn Khilīkān described him "a poor man among rich and a rich man among prophets", that because he spent his life at court and in administration and he was keen to learn chemistry, not the religious studies as most of the learned men were in his time. J. H. Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab chronicle*, 1, pp. 43-69 (He pays particular attention to comparing Ibn Miskawayh with Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī); D. S. Margoliuth, *Lectures on Arabic Historians* (University of Calcutta 1930) pp.130-131; M. Arkoun, "Ibn Miskawayh" EI.

makes him an eyewitness of local events in the 'Abbasid caliphate in the tenth century. The main work of Ibn Miskawayh is his history *Kitāb tajārib al-umam*<sup>98</sup> which is the main source for the events in Iraq, as well as the struggle between the Ḥamdanids against Byzantium. While he quotes verbatim from al-Ṭabarī and al-Tanūkhī, whom he refers to several times, his work is the main source for late historians who copied from him.<sup>99</sup>

The book of Ibn Miskawayh was supplemented by al-Rudhrāwarī, Abū Shujā' Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 972 / 361), who was a vizier and writer in the later 'Abbasid era. As a religious man, in his vizierate he renewed the harsh treatment of non-Muslims (al-dhimma).<sup>100</sup> His book<sup>101</sup> is the main source for events in Iraq and Syria during the tenth century.

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī (d. 1071/ 463 H)<sup>102</sup> composed a biographical encyclopædia *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdad* devoted to every notable individual who had lived in Baghdad or visited it. He focuses mainly on the authorities of the Ḥadīth, but nevertheless, his book provides some important evidences of Byzantine-Muslim relations.

Ibn al-Qalānisī (d 1169/555H.) is the main Arab historian and eyewitness of events of the First Crusade and its eve. He devotes his book<sup>103</sup> to the local history of

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<sup>98</sup> -Ibn Miskawayh, *Kitāb tajārib al-umam* (Book of the experiences of the Nations) vols. 5-6, ed. H.F. Amedroz (Cairo 1915) ed. H.F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth, *The Eclipse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate*, I-II, trans. III-IV (Oxford 1920-1921). It is noteworthy that he had another book about morals, of with less historical importance, see Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, (The refinement of Character) ed. C.K. Zurayk, (The American University, Beirut 1967)

<sup>99</sup> - One can list names of Sabṭ ibn Jaūzi, Ibn al-'Adīm, and Ibn al-Athīr.

<sup>100</sup> - Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 284.

<sup>101</sup> - Al-Rudhrāwarī, *Dhayl kitāb tajārib al-umam* (continuation of the book: *tajārib al-umam*) ed. H. F. Amedroz, (Cairo 1916). English translation as vol. VI of the *Eclipse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate*, Trans. H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth, (Oxford 1921).

<sup>102</sup> -On his life and works, c.f. Ibn Khlikān, *Wafīāt al-a'īān wa 'anbā' 'abnā' al-zamān* (The biographical dictionary) ed. I. 'Abbās, 8 vols (Beirut 1977) 1, pp. 92-93.

<sup>103</sup> -Ibn al-Qalanisī, *Dhayl tārikh Dimashq*, ed. H. F. Amedroz (Beirut 1908) reprinted in Cairo, presumably a copy of Amedroz's original edition.

the city of Damascus from 974 /363 H. His book gives a vivid account of the interwoven conflict around his city between the Fatimids and other Muslim powers. Also he dealt with the relations between the Fatimids and Byzantines in the reign of Basil II, as well as internal history of Egypt in the Fatimid era focusing on the period of al-Ḥākim and his intolerant policy towards non-Muslims.

**Ibn al-Athīr**, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad<sup>104</sup> (d. 1234) wrote a universal history from the creation to his own time. He followed a strict annual sequence but without the chains of authorities. Like most of the Muslim historians, he quoted verbatim from his predecessors without naming them. Ibn al-Athīr writes as a historian, and does not bother to comment on any religious issue. It is noteworthy that he focuses mainly on events in Iraq and Persia, with some attention to Byzantine Muslim relations. A Sunni, he was biased against the Fatimids, even omitting or mostly abridging their history.

**Ibn al-‘Adīm**, Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Qāsim ‘Umar b. Aḥmad (d. 1261) composed a history, arranged in alphabetical order, of his city Aleppo.<sup>105</sup> From this long history, he condensed a history of the city,<sup>106</sup> in a moderate tone, using a mixture of the traditional strict annual sequences and separate treatment for each ruler. Although Ibn al-‘Adīm depended on earlier works, such as Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Miskawayh, and others, he is the only historian who gives the complete text of the treaty between Byzantium and the Ḥamdanids in Aleppo.<sup>107</sup> He does not mention his sources, but they seem to be some documents preserved in the city to which he had access.

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<sup>104</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-ta’rīkh* (The perfect in history) ed. C. J. Tornberg (Leiden 1867-1876)

<sup>105</sup> -Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fī ta’rīkh Ḥalab*, ed. S. Zakār (Beirut 1988)). See Sauvaget, ‘Extraits du Bughyat al-talab d’Ibn al-‘Adīm (d’après le Ms de Constantinople)’, *REI* 3 (1933) pp. 393-490; A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, p. 177.

<sup>106</sup> -Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat al-ḥalab min ta’rīkh Ḥalab* (The quintessence from the history of Aleppo), (Beirut. 1966).

<sup>107</sup> -Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat al-ḥalab*, pp. 95-98; English translation, W. Farag, ‘The truce of Safar A.H. 359- December – January 969-970’, (Birmingham 1977).

There were some other notable historians and writers in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Among them are Hilāl al-Şābi'<sup>108</sup> (d. 1056AD./ 448 H.), al-Şūli<sup>109</sup> (d. 946-335). The main historian of this period Thābit b. Sinān (d. 976 A.D. /365 H.),<sup>110</sup> and his history is the main source for most of the later historians, who copied it almost verbatim.

Late Muslim historians, though they copied almost verbatim from earlier works, by these means they preserved traces of several lost works. Among the huge number of these later historians are al-Dhahabī (d.1348 A.D./ 748H)<sup>111</sup> and al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmed b. 'Alī (d. 1422 A.D./ 825 H.), who was a leading historian, with many interests. Although he lived considerably later, his works are still valuable in some respects. He composed several books; among them his book on the history of the Fatimid era bears a special importance.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> -This epithet al-Şābi' came from a sect called al-Şābi'ah, whose practice was a mixture derived from older Persian sects. However the Arabic biographers confuse Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Hilāl al-Şābi' (died in 990 / 380 H) with his grandson Hilāl b. al-Maḥssin b. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm who died in 1090 / 483. He (the grandson) was an eloquent writer who composed several books, his correspondences contained in a large book, a book about the history of the Būyids, and a vivid discription of the protocol of the 'Abbasid court. From the introduction to his book "The history of the viziers" he seems to be still affected by some Persian ideas, and beliefs such as the transmigration of souls. Sadly his history is lost and surviving fragments cover only three years (999-1003 A.D./ 389-393 A.H.). Even so it still a great source for the 'Abbasid history. Al-Şābi', *Tuḥfī al-amrā' fī tārīkh al-wuzāra'* (The history of the viziers), ed. H. F. Amedroz, (Beirut, 1904) p. 2.; on his life, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 134; Ibn Khlikān, *Wafīāt al-a'īān*, I, pp. 52-53. See for analysis of the sources of 'Abbasid history H. Kennedy, *The prophet and the age of the caliphates: the Islamic near east from the sixth to the eleventh century* (New York 1992) pp. 364-388. On al-Şābi', p. 368.

<sup>109</sup> -Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā b. al-'Abbās al-Şūli, was the teacher of the caliph al-Rādī, and one of the distinguished men in the 'Abbasid court during the reigns of al-Rādī, al-Muqtafī and al-Muqtadir. He composed several books, one of them called: *al-'Awāriq fī tārīkh al-khulfa'* (the papers in the history of the caliphs). Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, pp. 150-151; al-Şābi', *Tuḥfī al-'amra'*, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> - For more about Sinān b. Thābit, see al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 304; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 159.

<sup>111</sup> -Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, ed. 'U. A. Tadmurī (Beirut 1989). The edition which I have used appears in 41 volumes, but without individual numbers for each volume, instead the editor has allocated each volume for number of years. So I will refer to the year and page of the quotations, regardless of the volume number.

## Geographical sources.

Arabic geographers offer rich and important materials on Islamic history as well as Muslim-Byzantine relations. Among the early works is Ibn Khurdādhābih,<sup>113</sup> who set the base for the following writers, who often utilised his book. Qudamah b. Ja'far (d. 948 / 337 H). Qudamah converted to Islam during the reign of al-Muqtafi. He wrote some works on geography, and kharāj (the tax system).<sup>114</sup> Ibn Hawqal (X century) wrote about the Byzantine Empire and the frontier area between Byzantium and Muslims.<sup>115</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, Shams al-dīn Muḥammad (tenth century) composed a book entitled *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm*,<sup>116</sup> in which he summarises the Arab's geographical knowledge, and adds other facts which are hard to find elsewhere. Ibn Rustah preserved the narrative of Hārūn ibn Yaḥya, a Muslim former prisoner of war in Byzantium.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> - Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz al-ḥunafā fi akhbār al-a'imah al-Faṭīmyīn al-khulafa*, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1967-1973).

<sup>113</sup> - Ibn Khurdādhābih, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-mamālik*, ed. M. J. De Goeije, *BGA* VI (Leiden 1889).

<sup>114</sup> - Qudamah b. Ja'afar, *kitāb kharāj*, (a portion of the book starting from chapter 11), ed. M. J. De Goeije, *BGA* VI, pp. 184-292, (Leiden 1889). On Qudamah, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Firhrist*, p. 130; On Qudamah and Byzantium, see J. Haldon, 'Qdamah b. Dja'afar and the garrison of Constantinople', *B* 48 (1978) pp. 78-90.

<sup>115</sup> - Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb ṣurat al-'araḍ* (The book of image of the earth) ed. J. Kramers, *BGA* II (Leiden 1938). In the same edition there are some additions, which seem to be later interpolations; they are mainly comments on the changing control over the cities between Byzantium and the Muslims. The editor, however, realised this and singled them out. There is a French translation of some fragments, see Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, and 2, pp. 411-421.

<sup>116</sup> - Al-Muqaddasi, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī mu'rifi al-aqālīm*, ed. M. De Goeje, *BGA*, III; English translation, *The best divisions for the knowledge of the regions*, trans. B. Collins, (Centre for Muslim contribution to civilization, Reading 1994). Partial French trans. Al-Muqaddasi, *Description de l'occident Musulmane du IVe-Xe*, texte arabe et trad. C. Fellat (Alger 1950).

<sup>117</sup> - Ibn Rustah, *al-a'lāq al-naṣīṣah* (Leiden 1891) pp. 119-123. English translation of story of Hārūn ibn Yaḥyā, A. Vasiliev, 'Hārūn ibn Yaḥyā and his description of Constantinople', *SK* 5 (1932) 149-63.

## Arab encyclopaedists

Among the legacy of the Arab civilisation, there are considerable numbers of large-scale encyclopaedias.<sup>118</sup> These works cover a wide range of knowledge, biographical dictionaries or geographical dictionaries of cities' names, and other branches of knowledge. Al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418 AD./ 821 H) a late Egyptian writer composed a unique encyclopaedia,<sup>119</sup> in which he includes a comprehensive guidebook for writing different categories of diplomatic letters and treaties. In his instructions for new writers, he gives some authentic examples of documents throughout the Islamic history. These documents saw the light only through his book, and they cover all sides of the whole Islamic civilisation as a whole. Significantly, some of them are directly related to Byzantium.<sup>120</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm's work *al-Fihrist* is a unique and extremely useful encyclopaedia. It is a survey of all the compilations in Arabic, and their authors. Needless to say, through such a book, we can trace earlier versions of the historical and polemical works, which certainly helps to indicate the authenticity of suspect works, as well as indicating some lost ones.

## Other Arabic sources: Poetry and oratory

Poetry is the art of the Arabs; they use it to maintain their traditions and pass on news in poetic form. The Arabs were very enthusiastic to preserve the legacy of their

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<sup>118</sup> -C. Pellat, 'Les encyclopédies dans le monde arabe' XVIII, *Etudes sur l'histoire socio-culturelle de l'Islam (VIIe- XVe)* Variorum (London 1976).

<sup>119</sup> -Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'sha fī ṣinā'it al-'insha*, (*The dawn for the night-blind in the skills of composition*) 14 vols (Cairo 1913-1922). On the author and his life, see the introduction to vol. 14, pp. 14-20.

<sup>120</sup> -This includes some documents such as a letter from Muḥammad al-'Ikshīd, the governor of Egypt to the emperor Romanus Lecapenus, a treaty between the Byzantine rebel Bardas Scleurs and Ṣimṣām al-Dāwlah, the emir of the Daylamite Būyids in Baghdad; and from later periods, the text of two treatises between the emperor Michael VIII Paleologous, and the two of the Mamlukids Sultans in Egypt in the 13<sup>th</sup>. century. Furthermore, he saved other local Muslim documents which are of great importance, such as the texts of the decrees from the caliphs to the Christian patriarch, which shed light on the relations between the Muslim authorities and their non-Muslim subjects.



ancestors. Undoubtedly, one can assume that poetry was the mass media of the Arabs, their way of spreading news, panegyric, criticism, rumours and propaganda.

In the Byzantine-Muslim struggle, the poetry plays a significant role. The Arab poets chanted the heroes of the Jihad, and aroused men to take part in it. Although their main purpose in eulogising their benefactors, the emirs and caliphs, was unequivocally the rich rewards which those emirs would give, but their poetry was a kind of medium to transmit news, glorify the heroes of the war, and spread anti-Byzantium propaganda in Muslim lands.

The most brilliant names among those poets who chanted the Arab heroes whom one can mention are those of **Abū Tammām** (847 A.D./ 233H.),<sup>121</sup> **al-Buḥutrī** (d. 897 A.D./ 284H.) and **al-Mutanabbī**<sup>122</sup> (d. 955A.D/ 343 H.). **Abū Firās**, **al-Ḥarith b. Sa'īd b. Ḥamdān** (d. 968/ 357)<sup>123</sup> a prince and poet who has a special place among these poets; he was half-Byzantine, though nothing is known about his Byzantine mother. He took part in the Muslim Jihad against Byzantium, and was captured by the Byzantine armies.<sup>124</sup> In his captivity he wrote long, bitter and dispirited poems describing his homesickness and his longing to return his family and his fatherland.<sup>125</sup> **Ibn Nabātah al-Sa'dī**<sup>126</sup> (d. 984 /374H) was an orator cleric and lived in the border

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<sup>121</sup> -A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, English translation, S.P. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammam*, pp. 187-196.

<sup>122</sup> -For more about his life and his poetry, see Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 3, p. 340-34; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, pp. 102-108. See M. Canard, 'Mutanabbi et la guerre byzantino-arabe: Intérêt historique des poésies', in idem, *Byzance et les Musulmans du proche Orient*, Variorum (London 1973); A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, pp. 305-348

<sup>123</sup> - On Abū Firās, see Ibn Khilīkān, 2, pp. 58-64; O. Petit and W. Visin, *Abū Firas al-Hamdani: Chevalier poète, choix de poèmes* (Paris 1990).

<sup>124</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 784.

<sup>125</sup> -*Diwān Abī Firas al-Ḥamdāni*, ed. A. al-Sāter (Beirut 1983).

<sup>126</sup> -Abū Yaḥyā 'Abd al-Rāḥīm b. 'Ismā'īl b. Nabātah, who was born and died in the city of Mayyāfārqīn. Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 4, p. 146; A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, pp. 292-294. His speeches were collected and published, Ibn Nabātah, *Diwān khuṭab Ibn Nabātah*, (Beirut 1894); some are reprinted in M. Canard, *Sayf al Daula, Recueil de texts relatifs à l'émir Sayf al Daula le Hamadanide avec annotations*, (Alger 1934). (Arabic texts with some French annotations) passim.

area, one of Sayf al-dwalah's retinue. His inflammatory speeches were the main medium of anti-Byzantine propaganda, as well as an effective way to recruit new volunteers.

## Arabic Christian sources

It is noteworthy that the early Arab Christian thinkers were fully acquainted with the Greek language, at least during the decades after Islamic conquests. This ability secured them a role in the administration of the newly established Arabic states. At the same time, when the 'Abbasid caliphs, especially al-Ma'mūn, were keen to translate and transfer the Greek knowledge, these Christian Arabs were the backbone of the movement of translation and one of their leading scholars, was Ḥanīn b. Ishāq.<sup>127</sup>

In sum, the Christian Arab writers merely fill the gap left between the Muslims and Byzantine sources. From the Muslims, they quoted valuable material, while omitting their complex and ample style. A few of them were acquainted with the events in Byzantium, but they give detailed narratives on the life of the Christian communities within Muslim realm. Obviously, most of these writings, however, are simple, and crude, as most of the texts show. One may hypothesise that they were destitute of the adequate learning of Arabic, which was usually associated with the Qur'ān at this time.

**John of Damascus**, Maṣṣūr b. Sirjūn b. Maṣṣūr, the father and pioneer of Byzantine polemic against Islam, a Christian Arab and a writer at the court of four Muslim caliphs.<sup>128</sup> Among his many works,<sup>129</sup> is his masterpiece *The fountain of*

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<sup>127</sup>-Ḥanīn b. Ishāq al-'Abādī, (d. in Safar 873/260) a Christian doctor, thinker and translator. He came from an Arab tribe around Ḥira. H. He was eloquent in Arabic, Syrian, and Greek, and travelled to acquire books and knowledge between Muslim and Byzantine lands. As a doctor most of his works and translations were mainly on medicine, Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, pp. 294-295.

<sup>128</sup> - Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf*, pp. 277, 281, 285, 289.

<sup>129</sup> -The works of John of Damascus against Islam were published and studied several times. See John of Damascus, *Liber de Haeresibus* (ch. 101) PG 94, cols. 764-773; Recently re-edited with a parallel German Translation, Gleis and Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodore Abū Qurrah*,

*Knowledge*, in which he devotes chapter 100/101 to arguments against Islam, considering it a Christian Arian heresy.<sup>130</sup> The works of John of Damascus against Islam were supplemented by his disciple, the Melkite writer Theodore Abū Qurrah, who was Melkite writer of whose life few details are known, died circa (820- 825 A.D.). In the introduction to Abū Qurrah's book, *Maymar fī wujūd al-khāliq wa al-dīn al-qawīm*, Dick studies different Muslim and Christian sources to find any traces of his name or any possible similar names.<sup>131</sup> However, in spite of his intensive work, there are still some unanswered questions about Abū Qurrah, his life and the long list of works attributed to him.<sup>132</sup>

He composed several works on different theological issues.<sup>133</sup> It is noteworthy that his works are in Arabic and Greek, while some of them have been translated into

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*Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 77-83; B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos, Opera polemica*, (Berlin/ New York 1981) 4, *Liber de Haeresibus*, pp. 11-59, English translation, D. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, pp. 132-141. On John of Damascus and his works, see A. Abel, 'Le chapitre CI du livre des Heresies de Jean Damascene; son inauthenticite' *SI* (1963) pp. 5-25; H. Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur*, pp. 476-486; A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 47-82; W. Voorhis, 'John of Damascus on the Moslem heresy', *MW* 24 (1934) 390-398; P. Khoury, 'Jean Damascène et l'Islam' *POC* 7 (1957) pp. 44 - 63; 8 (1958) pp. 313 - 39; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 480- 889. On the life of John of Damascus, see C. Basha, *Biographie de St. Jean Damascène, texte original arabe*, (Harissa -Lebanon 1912); J. Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas: son époque, sa vie, son oeuvre*, (Harisa Lebanon 1950); re-published in Arabic, J. Nasrallah, *Mansur ibn Sarjun, al-ma'ruf bi al-Qidis Yḥanna al-Dimashaqi: 'asruhu, ḥayatuhu, mu'ullafatuhu*, (Beirut 1992).

<sup>130</sup> - See discussion of this text in chapter I.

<sup>131</sup> -Abū Qurra, *Maymar fī wujūd al-khāliq wa al-dīn al-qawīm (Traite de l'existence du createur et de la varie religion)* ed. I. Dick (Beirut 1982).

<sup>132</sup> - Actually the surviving fragments about Abū-Qurrah in the contemporary sources fall short of providing a complete portrait of his life. Among the Muslim sources, only al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn al-Nadīm allude to him, but both merely hint at someone with a similar name as a translator or the bishop of Hiran. Al-Jāḥiẓ mentions a certain Christian translator called Ibn Qurrah, while Ibn al-Nadīm speaks about someone called Abū-'Aza. The anonymous Syrian writer stands alone with a narrative about a dialogue between Abu-Qurrah and the caliph al-Ma'mūn. Other Christian sources give fragments about Abū-Qurrah. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 24; al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, p. 325; *Anonymi auctoris chronicon*, ed. A.C. Pertinens, trans. A. Abouna, CSCO 345; Syriac, t. 154 (Louvain 1974) p. 16. C.f. the introduction of I. Dick, Abū Qurra, *Maymar fī wujūd al-khāliq*, pp. 24-39.

<sup>133</sup> See S. Griffith, *The controversial theology of Theodore Abu Qurrah (c. 750-820 A.D.) a methodological comparative study in Christian Arabic literature*, Ph.D. thesis; The Catholic University of America, (Washington DC, 1978); Idem, 'The view of Islam from the monasteries of Palestine in the Early Abbasid period: Theodore Abū Qurrah and the Summa Theologiae Arabica', *JCMR* 7 (1996) 9-28; A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 83-105; 'Theodore Abū Qurrah's

Georgian. Remarkably, his works against Islam are preserved only in Greek.<sup>134</sup> He was perhaps afraid of hostile reaction from the Muslim authorities to such a work in Arabic. Yet, one of his Arabic works is a lengthy treatise about the existence of God and what is the right religion,<sup>135</sup> in which he writes only hints against Islam. Like John of Damascus he was a defender of icons, and composed a lengthy treatise on this.<sup>136</sup>

Christian Arab historians composed several chronicles which are of extreme importance. Unlike the Muslim historians, they paid special attention to the life of the Christian minorities within the Muslim world, their life and their relations with the Muslims.

**Severus of Alexandria (Ibn al-Muqaffa' c.10<sup>th</sup> Century).**<sup>137</sup> He is an Egyptian Coptic writer, who took part in some religious debates with Muslims.<sup>138</sup> His annals, however, are collections of works, written by different hands, each speaking as an eyewitness. Obviously, he copied verbatim from other Coptic manuscripts without any editorial additions.<sup>139</sup> The books gives a close look at the internal affairs of the Christians living

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on the veneration of the holy icons: Orthodoxy in the world of Islam' *Sacred Art Journal*, 13 (1992) 3-19.

<sup>134</sup> -Abū Qurrah's works concerning Islam include several small treatises; some of them discuss general theological issues, while only three are directed against Islam and aimed at refuting the prophecy of Muḥammad. Abū Qurrah, *Contra Haereticos, Judaeos et Saracenos varia opuscula* .PG 97, cols. 1461-1596, ed with parallel German translation, *Opuscula Islamica*, R. Gleib (Altenberge 1993).

<sup>135</sup> -Abū Qurrah, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq*; I. Dick, 'La discussion d'Abū Qurra avec les ulémas musulmans devant le calife al-Ma'mūn', *Parole de l'Orient* 5-6 (1990-1991) pp. 107-113.

<sup>136</sup> -Abū Qurra, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq* (texte Arabe) ed. I. Dick (Rome 1986).

<sup>137</sup> -Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Historia Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum*, ed C. F. Seybold tomus 1: 1, *CSCO* 52, *Scrip. Arab.* 8, t. 1:2 *CSCO* 59, *Scrip. Arab.* 9 (Louvain 1910, 1962); re-published as *Tārīkh btāriqat al-kanīṣah al-Maṣrīyah, al-ma'rūf bī sayr al-bay'ah al-muqdasah (History of the Patriarchs of Egyptian church, an Arab text with an English translation)* ed. A. S. Atyia et al., (Cairo 1943-1974). I have used the first volume (2 parts) edited by Sebold, then used the edition of A. Atyia for the other parts, and referred to all as *Tārīkh*. On the author and his work, see F. R. Farag, 'The technique of research of a tenth-century Christian Arab writer: Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Le Muséon* 86 (1973) pp. 37-66; *CE*, s.v. 'History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria'; *CE*, s.v. 'Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa',.

<sup>138</sup> -Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II: 2, p. 92.

<sup>139</sup> -For instance, the author of the part which coincided with al-Ḥākim's reign was a certain cleric called Michael, later the bishop of Tannis (Northern Egypt, near Damiatta). Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II: 2, pp. 133, 147.

in Egypt, but makes some clear historical mistakes, once his narrative goes beyond Egyptian borders.<sup>140</sup> His language is elegant and tends to be simple, using some colloquial Egyptian words.

The Melkite sect produced some good writers and historians, whose position and lives between Muslim and Byzantium, gave them a special importance in the religious scope of the Byzantine-Muslim relations. Eutychius, Sa'īd b. Baṭrīq<sup>141</sup> (877-940 AD./ 263- 328H.) the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, composed a chronicle, which reflects Melkite views and attitudes towards the events in the tenth century, as well as his utter unfamiliarity with affairs in Constantinople. In theology he composed a polemical work directed mainly against Jews.<sup>142</sup> Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭākī (d. 1066AD./ 458H.).<sup>143</sup> A Melkite, and a relative of Eutychius; he was a Byzantine in his belief. More important, he pays attention to the Melkite church in Egypt and his book reveals more specific and eyewitness details of this Christian minority, who had been relatively ignored by Muslim and other Christian historians. Yaḥyā lived in Egypt for the first part of his life, in which he witnessed the reign of al-Ḥākim. Later in 405 H. he emigrated to Antioch.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> -He narrates that the caliph al-Amīn fought against his father Hārūn al-Rashīd and even killed him! In addition he is confused about their names as well. Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, pp. 248, p. 279.

<sup>141</sup> -Sa'īd b. al-Bātrīq (Eutychius) *Kitāb al-tārīkh al-majmū' ala al-taḥqīq wa al-taṣdīq* (Annales) ed. L. Cheikho et al., CSCO, Scr. Arab. 6, 7 (Paris 1905). On Sa'īd b. al-Bātrīq, see the comprehensive study of M. Breydry, *Etudes sur Sa'īd ibn Bātrīq et ses sources*, CSCO, Subsidia; 69 (Louvain 1983). On his information on Byzantium, see S. Griffith, 'Eutychius of Alexandria on the emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: a tenth century moment in Christian apology in Arabic' *B* 52 (1982) 154-90.

<sup>142</sup> -Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Bātrīq, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, ed. P. Cachia, CSCO, 192-193; Scrip. Arab. 20-23; (Louvain 1960-1961)

<sup>143</sup> - A Christian Melkite historian born circa 970, and died around 1066 AD./ 458 H. He was a doctor. The life and work of Yaḥyā have been studied in detail. See J. H. Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab chronicle (938-1034) of Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭākī*.

<sup>144</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 708.

His work is a supplement (*Dhayl*)<sup>145</sup> to the history of his ancestor and relative Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq.<sup>146</sup> Yaḥyā was an eyewitness and had first-hand information, especially for the reign of al-Ḥākim, to whom he paid special attention, as he himself was one of the victims of the capricious Muslim caliph. Yaḥyā also reportedly composed two polemical works, against Jews and the Muslims. These two alleged treatises are not published yet and are in private possession in Aleppo.<sup>147</sup> Yaḥyā's technique is an intermediate position between the strict annual chronicle and the other narratives. His language is simple, and primitive, with some grammatical mistakes. Ibrāhīm b. Yūḥanā composed *Vita Christophori*,<sup>148</sup> which is a hagiographical account of the life of the Christopher, the Melkite patriarch of Antioch who was killed by Muslims in the city in 967 AD./ 356H.

## The Armenian and Syrian sources

The Armenian sources such as Sebeos;<sup>149</sup> John Catholicus,<sup>150</sup> and Matthew of Edessa<sup>151</sup> provided, albeit from a local standpoint, valuable information on Muslims and their relations with others. Perhaps Matthew of Edessa is the only historian who kept a copy of the letter of the emperor John Tzimiskes to the Armenian king Ashot III.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> -Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, ed. A. Vasiliev, *PO* 18, pp. 705-833; *PO* 23, pp. 349-520.

<sup>146</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 705.

<sup>147</sup> -R. Gaspar et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien', *Islamochristiana*, 2 (1976) p. 202; Graf G. *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 2, p. 51; J. H. Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab chronicle*, I, p.21.

<sup>148</sup> -Habib Zayyat, 'La vie du Patriarche Melkite Christophre (d. 967) par le protospathaire Ibrahim b. Yuhanna, Document Inédit du Xe siècle', *POC* 2 (1952) 11-38, 333- 366. On the historical value of this vita, see J. H. Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab chronicle*, I, pp. 182-186.

<sup>149</sup> - Sebeos, *Sebeos' History*, trans. R. Bedrosian, Sources of the Armenian tradition, (New York 1985)

<sup>150</sup> -John Catholicus, *Yuvannē draxanakertc'i: History of Armenia*, trans. with commentary K. H. Maksoudrian (Atlanta, 1987).

<sup>151</sup> - Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the crusades, tenth to twelfth centuries: The chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, English trans. A. E. Dostourian, (Maryland 1993).

<sup>152</sup> - Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, pp. 29-33.

Similarly, Ghevond<sup>153</sup> kept a copy of the alleged correspondence between the emperor Leo III and the caliph 'Umar II.

Syrian sources give rich information on the history of Islam,<sup>154</sup> especially in Mesopotamia. Most of the Syrian historians were bilingual, which enables them to use different sources, thus their works are of great importance, especially for the events in north Syria. Michael The Syrian (1126-1199)<sup>155</sup> and Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286)<sup>156</sup> shed valuable light on the Byzantine-Muslim warfare of the tenth century, and provide vital information on the history of the local Christians between Byzantium and the Muslims. Bar Hebraeus, with the Arab Muslim reader in mind abridged his Syrian Chronicle into a modified Arabic version, with more omission and fewer additions.<sup>157</sup>

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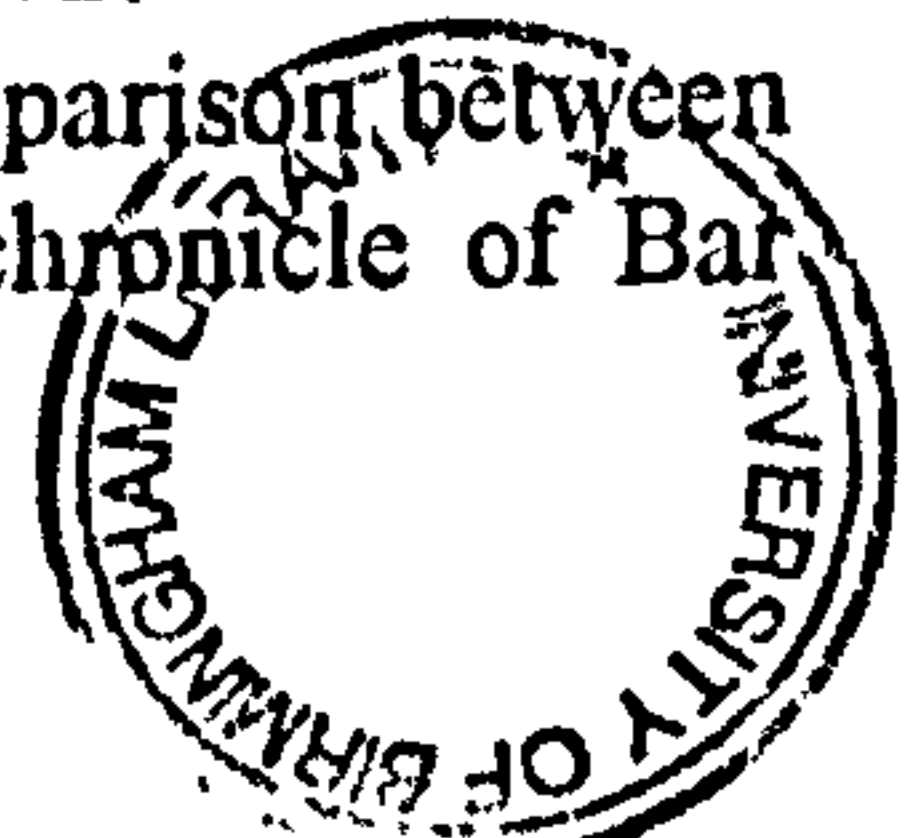
153 -Ghevond, *Histoire des guerres et des conquêtes des Arab en Arménie*, trans. G.V. Chahnazarian, (Paris 1856).

154 - S.P. Brock, 'Syriac sources for seventh-century history', *BMGS*, 2 (1976) pp. 17-36.

155 -Michel le Syrien, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarch Jacobite d'Antioch*, 4 vols. trans. J.B. Chabot, (Paris 1899-1910). See Gero, *Byzantine iconoclasm during the reign of Leo III*, pp. 205-209.

156 -Bar Hebraeus, *The chronography of Gregory Abū'-Faraj*, trans., A Budge. (Oxford 1932). On the sources of Bar Hebraeus, see M. Ishaq, 'Maṣādir Abi al-Faraj al-Mālṭī al-tārīkhīh', the historical sources of al-Faraj al-Mālṭī (Bar Hebraeus)', *Aram Periodical* I: 1 (1989) pp. 149-172.

157 -Bar Hebraeus, *Kitāb mukhtaṣar al-duwal*, ed. Salḥani (Beirut 1890). On the comparison between the Syrian origin and the Arabic version, see L. I. Conrad, 'On the Arabic chronicle of Bar Hebraeus: his aims and audience', *Parole de l'Orient* 19 (1994) pp. 319-378.



## Chapter One

### Byzantium and Islam: An introduction

"ALM,<sup>1</sup> al-Rūm (The Roman empire) has been defeated, in the land close by, but they (even), after this defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious, within a few years with God is the Decision in the past and the future: on that day shall the believers rejoice<sup>2</sup>". With these verses, the Qur'ān foretold the fate of Byzantium in its struggle with the Persians in the first half of the seventh century. It is the only time that this word al-Rūm appears in the Qur'ān. According to Islamic traditions, this verse had been revealed before 622 AD, i.e. before al-hijra (The prophet Muḥammad's emigration to Medina), when the Byzantine-Persian war was at its climax<sup>3</sup>. The Islamic sources narrated that the Muslims, at this early stage of Islamic history, were observing this war between the two universal powers, and having a remarkable sympathy with Byzantium, considering the Byzantines as Ahl-al-Kitāb (the people of the book) and feeling closer to them<sup>4</sup>. At this early date there was no record of any possible Byzantine-Muslim relations, as the Muslims were a helpless minority in

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<sup>1</sup> -Six of the Qur'ānic chapters begin with these abbreviated and separated letters, which have different meanings in the Islamic tradition, but there is no agreed interpretation of them. Most Muslim thinkers, however, tend to consider these characters as a divine secret. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (explanation of the Qur'ān), 3 vols. (Beirut 1986) 1, pp. 38-39; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1, pp. 86-96; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 1, pp. 154-157; for the summary of the major Muslim tafsīr books, see M. al-Ṣābūnī, *Ṣafwit al-tafāsīr* (choice of explanations of the Qur'ān) 1, pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> - Qur'ān, 30, 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> -Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1, pp. 432-437; al-Nisābūrī, *Asbāb al-tanzīl* (Reasons of the revelations of the verses of the Qur'ān) (Beirut 1991) p. 285.

<sup>4</sup> -Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa akhbārāha* (Conquests of Egypt and its news) (Cairo 1991) p. 34. Gero is sceptical about the credibility and limits of the alleged Muslim sympathy with Byzantium. See S. Gero, 'Early contacts between Byzantium and the Arab empire: A review and Some Reconsiderations', in M. Bakhit, (ed.) *Proceedings of the Second Symposium in the history of Bilād al-Shām during the Early Islamic period up to 40 A.H./ 640 A. D.: The Fourth International Conference of the History of Bilād al-Shām* (Amman 1987) p. 125.



Mecca, suffering from the intolerance of Quraysh (Muhammad's tribe) and trying to establish their identity as a new monotheistic religion in this pagan region of Arabia.

From the Qur'ān,<sup>5</sup> the first Islamic source, it is well known that Quraysh, used to go every summer to Syria to trade. These journeys from the heart of Arabia to the Byzantine lands in Syria required, of course, some kind of trading permission from the Byzantine authorities there, or at least, from the Ghassanids, who were Arabic allies of Byzantium<sup>6</sup>. Actually, these caravans were the best and the only way to transfer any news or rumours, as well as political and religious propaganda between Byzantine lands and Arabia and vice versa.

It is noteworthy that Muhammad himself took part in two of these journeys, but unfortunately, Islamic sources, as well as the other sources, do not give any details about his personal contact with the Byzantine world; there are only Islamic traditional stories concerning his miracles as a future prophet under divine care,<sup>7</sup> and hazy accounts of his personal contacts in Syria. However, one of the best-known issues in the whole of Christian-Muslim polemics began during his first journey to Syria, when he was a child under the patronage of his uncle Abū-Ṭālib. It is the story of Bahīra the monk, which was reported differently by the two sides.<sup>8</sup> It is a clear

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<sup>5</sup> - "For the covenants (of security and safeguard enjoyed) by the Quraysh, Their covenants (covering) journeys by winter and summer, Let them adore the Lord of this House, Who provides them with food against hunger, and with security against fear (of danger). Qur'ān, 106: 2. On the explanation of this chapter, see I. Shahīd, 'Two Qur'ānic Surās: al-Fīl and Quraysh', no. 12 in idem, *Byzantium and the Semitic Orient before the rise of Islam*, Variorum (London 1988). He paid special attention to the linguistic problems of the text, with scant attention to the issue of trade itself.

<sup>6</sup> -For further discussions on this trade, see P. Crone, *Meccan trade and the rise of Islam*, (Princeton 1987) also of interest is the discussion of H. Kennedy, 'Change and continuity in Syria and Palestine', *Aram Periodical*, I: II (1989) p. 267.

<sup>7</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, p 82; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, (The life of Muhammad) ed. Wüstenfeld, (Göttingen 1858) I, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> - In this story, Islamic sources speak of a Christian monk called Bahīra, who met Muhammad, when he was a boy travelling with his uncle to Syria. According the narratives, the monk saw the signs of his future prophethood, and told his uncle to return to Mecca to protect him. The Christian sources talked about a certain monk, called Sergios, who taught Muhammad the Old Testament, the history

example of the complete contradiction between Islamic and Christian sources, which was used later in the Byzantine polemics against Islam.<sup>9</sup>

It appears that, during the Meccan period, the sharp contrasts between the Qur'ān and the Christian ethics was *in ovo*. At this time the Qur'ān concentrated only on denying the divine filiation of Jesus,<sup>10</sup> confirming the divine source of the Qur'ān,<sup>11</sup> and assuring its readers that the Bible contained prophecies about Muḥammad, which would be one of the most important issues in the Islamic polemics against Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

After 622 AD/ 1 H., the main scene in Arabia changed completely. Muḥammad and his followers migrated to Medina, after receiving support from the Arab tribes (al-Aws and al-Khazraj) there. In the new city the Islamic State took its first steps, and became a reality. In fact Muḥammad succeeded in making his new government in Medina, by building a strong and personal coalition between the emigrants (al-Muhājirūn) and the Muslim population of Medina, his supporters (al-Anṣār)<sup>13</sup>

In this new state, the first contact was made between Islamic authority and *Ahl-al-kitāb*, the Arab Jews in Medina, with whom Muḥammad made an agreement to make a single community (Ummah). At this point he was seeking the Jews' help

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of the old nations, and the basis of the new religion, which was nearer to Christianity, but corrupted later by the Jews. Ibn Ishāq, English translation Gullaume, p. 82; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, I, p. 115 (mainly the narrative of Ibn Ishāq) c.f. Shabo A.M., *An evaluative study of the Bahira story in the Muslim and Christian traditions*, MA thesis (Birmingham University 1983). For further discussions, see S. Gero, 'The legend of the monk Bahira, the cult of the cross and Iconoclasm', in Canivet and Rey-Coquais (eds.) *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, pp. 47-58; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 476-479.

<sup>9</sup> - John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus*, col. 764, English translation, D. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, appendix I, p. 133; Georgius Monachus, *Chronicon* II, p. 699; see A. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam*, VIIIe-XIIIe s. (Leiden 1972) pp. 76-87.

<sup>10</sup> - Qur'ān 19: 34-45.

<sup>11</sup> - Qur'ān 16,103.

<sup>12</sup> - 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawlah*, pp. 73-81.

against his other Arab enemies,<sup>14</sup> or at least avoiding any conflict with them in these early days, while trying to establish his dominion over the population of Medina<sup>15</sup>. It is noteworthy that, at this time, a Jewish Rabbi, ‘Abdullah b. Salām, converted to Islam<sup>16</sup>. Surprisingly, his conversion played an important part in the Islamic-Christian polemics, inasmuch as the Christian apologists ascribed to him what they call a fundamental change in the Qur’ānic attitude towards Christianity, and they considered him to mark a second stage in the formation (or deformation!) of Islamic dogma, after Baḥīra.<sup>17</sup>

However, this positive initial Islamic-Jewish relationship, shortly took the form of a religious and political challenge to Muḥammad’s rule in Medina. As Ibn Ishāq stated, “it was the Jewish rabbis who used to annoy the apostle with questions and introduce confusion, so as to confound the truth with falsity. The Qur’ān used to come down in reference to these questions of theirs”.<sup>18</sup> This disagreement between Muslims and Jews turned rapidly into a decisive struggle, which led eventually to the expulsion of the Jews out of al-Medina, and later from the whole Arabian Peninsula.

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<sup>13</sup> -“The apostle instituted brotherhood between his fellow emigrants and the helpers, and he said... ‘Let each of you take a brother in god” Ibn Ishāq, p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, pp.231-233.

<sup>15</sup> - See for more details, R. B Seriant, ‘The Sunnah Jāmi‘ah, pacts with Yathrib Jews, and the tahrīm of Yathrib: analysis and translation of the documents comprised in the so-called constitution of Medina’, in Uri Rubin (ed.) *The life of Muhammad, the formation of the classical Islamic world 4*, (Variorum- Ashgate 1998).

<sup>16</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, p.240.

<sup>17</sup> - Al-Kindī and Hāshimī, *Risālat ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Ismā‘īl al-Hāshimī ilā ‘Abd al-Masīḥ bin Ishāq al-Kindī yad‘ūhu bihā ilā al-Islām, wa risālat ‘Abd al-Masīḥ ilā al-Hāshimī yaruddu bihā ‘alayhi wa yad‘ūhu ilā al-Naṣrāniyyah*, (the message of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Ismā‘īl al-Hāshimī to ‘Abd al-Masīḥ bin Ishāq al-Kindī, in which he invites him to embrace Islam and the response ‘Abd al-Masīḥ, to al-Hāshimī, inviting him to embrace the Christianity) ed. Bible Lands Missions, Aid Society (London 1912) p.86. See the Islamic response in the so-called ‘Umar’s letter, D Sourdel ‘Un pamphlet musulman anonyme’, p.23.

<sup>18</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, p. 239; for more details on Muḥammad’s relations with Jews, see Ibn Hishām, pp. 391-401.

After establishing his new government, Muḥammad began to expand his preaching as well as his authority beyond Medina. He began with the other Arab tribes; so the Muslim expeditions began to be sent, firstly against Quraysh, and then spread into the rest of Arabia peninsula. Gradually Islam became widespread in Arabia. Most of the Arabic tribes became Muḥammad's allies, and in 630 A.D./ 8 A.H. Muslims entered Mecca, the first Islamic sanctuary, and destroyed the idols in it.<sup>19</sup> Muḥammad became the master of most of Arabia, and finally, as the Qur'ān states, " This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion".<sup>20</sup> It was the first time that Arab tribes in Arabia were associated under one command, after years of nomadic system, with no central power.

### **The Islamic challenge to Christianity: The Qur'ān**

Once the Islamic state was firmly established, the Qur'ānic attitude towards Christianity took its final form. The Qur'ān dealt with, or rather confronted Christian ethics in many issues. Although, it would be generally inappropriate to study the Qur'ānic verses out of their context, at least, some of the main views can be elucidated in some points:

**On the trinity:** The Qur'ān denies the notion of Trinity, in many verses, " Not to say trinity, desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God" (4, 171), " They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a trinity", (5,76). This attitude forms the backbone of all the Christian-Muslim polemics

**On the nature of Christ** ('Isa ibn Mariam): although the Qur'ān confirms his special nature, as a word of God (3: 45; 4, 171), yet differently from the Christian notion of

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<sup>19</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, pp 540-561.

<sup>20</sup> - Qur'ān, 5: 4.

the word of God<sup>21</sup>, begotten without father (3,47; 12,166), supported by the Holy Spirit (2,87/253), healing the blind and lepers, and raising the dead, (5,110). It absolutely denies the divinity of Christ (5,17; 5,72; 5,116) confirming that he is just a prophet, like other messengers (4,171-172; 5,75; 19,30) and he is like Adam who had been created without a father (3,59).<sup>22</sup>

**On the crucifixion:** The Qur'ān is clear in its repudiation of the Christian concept of the self-sacrifice of Christ for mankind's sake to save them from Adam's sin, and its emphasis on denying that Jews killed Jesus on the cross:

" That they say (in boast) we killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary the apostle of God: but they killed him not nor crucified him but so it was made to appear to them and those who differ therein are full of doubts with no (certain) knowledge but only conjecture to follow for a surety they killed him not" (4, 157)

**On the Bible** (both Old and New Testaments). The Qur'ān strongly doubts the authenticity of the Bible, accusing the Christians and Jews of changing their book. It

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<sup>21</sup> - The Word of God in the Islamic notion is far from its concept in Christianity. The *Word of God* appears in the Qur'ān 30 times. In all of these example it has several meanings, as a divine command, or to elucidate that words of God are more than all the drops of water in all the oceans (Say: "If the ocean were ink (wherewith to write out) the words of my Lord. Sooner would the ocean be exhausted than would the words of my Lord, even if we added another ocean like it, for its aid". 18:109). As for the explanation of Jesus as "the Word of God", Muslim theologians consider that this equals "Be", the supreme way of God's divine absolute sovereignty over his creatures, so the word of God or God's command is carried by the angel Gabriel. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 3, p. 269. See M. Ayoub, 'The word of God in Islam', *GOTR*, 31,1-2 (1986) 69-78.

<sup>22</sup> -There are innumerable references to Jesus in the Qur'ān. See M. M Ayoub, 'Jesus the Son of God: a study of the terms Ibn and Walad in the Qur'ān and Tafsīr tradition' in Y. Y. Haddad, W.Z. Haddad, (eds.) *Christian-Muslim encounters* (University Press of Florida 1995) pp. 65-81; idem, 'The word of God in Islam', Ata Ur-Rahim M., *Jesus prophet of Islam*, (Norfolk 1977); S. M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ: an essay on the life, character, and teachings of Jesus Christ according to the Koran, and Orthodox tradition* (Edinburgh 1912).

states that they “Forgot a good part of a message that was sent them: so we estranged them with enmity and hatred between the one and other to the day of judgement”.<sup>23</sup>

**On the preaching of Islam:** The Qur’ān motivated Muslims to spread their religion, by using the best ways," Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious",<sup>24</sup> and told Muḥammad not to force anyone to embrace Islam,<sup>25</sup> but at the same time urges them to fight against people of the book (i.e. the Christians) until they became Muslims or pay al-Jizya, with total submission.<sup>26</sup>

This is the outline of the Qur’ānic view of Christianity, which formalised Islamic-Christian relations from the time of Muḥammad onwards, and which also deeply influenced the future Byzantine-Muslim encounters. The first start of these relations was discourse and agreement between Muḥammad and the Christian Arabs of Najrān (on the Southwest of Arabia). It was the first debate between Muslims and Christians, and interestingly, this time Muḥammad led the discussion himself. The main issues in this dialogue were the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the eating of pork, and the veneration of the cross.<sup>27</sup> It was the *terminus post quem* of this kind of dialogue, as well as the text of the agreement, which stated that:

“The state they previously held shall not be changed, nor shall any of their religious services or images<sup>28</sup> be changed. No attempt shall be made to turn a bishop from his office as a bishop”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> -The Qur’ān: 5,15.

<sup>24</sup> -The Qur’ān: 16, 125.

<sup>25</sup> -The Qur’ān: 10, 99.

<sup>26</sup> -The Qur’ān: 9,29.

<sup>27</sup> -The whole story is in Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, pp. 270- 277; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, pp. 75-77; English trans. P. Hitti, pp. 98-101.

<sup>28</sup> - If this narrative was to be trusted this is the earliest ever reference to the Islamic attitude towards Icons and the religious freedom of the non-Muslims in the realm of Islam.

Remarkably, the Muslim writers, Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām and al-Balādhurī did not effectively comment on this debate. While al-Balādhurī's narrative is short and abridged, both Ibn Ishāq, and Ibn Hishām, in their comments, simply copied, almost verbatim, some verses from the Qur'ān on Christianity, without adding anything to them.

It is well known that these Arabs maintained good relations with the Byzantine Empire, and were receiving subsidies and help from it to build their churches.<sup>30</sup> One wonders where Byzantium was during these events. Did those Arabs have any chance to inform the Byzantine emperor about this? Unfortunately there is no clear evidence of Byzantine realisation of these events taking place in the heart of Arabia.

Apparently the agreement between Muḥammad and the Christians of south Arabia, which gave them some rights at this time, pushed some other Christian sects to fabricate later, similar documents, allegedly written by the prophet's command and stamped with his name. Hamidallah published and examined most of these texts in his collection of early Muslim documents.<sup>31</sup> These fictitious texts, apart from the

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<sup>29</sup> - Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, pp. 75-77, English trans, P. Hitti, pp 100-101. This treaty does not appear in Ibn Hishām, whose narrative is considerably hazy. He speaks of their demand for a judge from the Muslims just to settle some financial disputes between them, and later in the same narrative, describes this Muslim judge as an emir. Ibn Hishām, *Sirat rasūl Allah*, 1, p. 410; while some later Muslim traditions reported that, they asked for a certain Muslim to teach them the doctrines of Islam. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3: 286.

<sup>30</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, p. 271; Ibn Hishām says they were " i.e. Melkites "من النصرانية على دين الملك"; al-Ṭabarī, 1:II, pp. 922-927. For further discussion on Christianity in Southern Arabia, see I. Shahīd, 'Byzantium in South Arabia', *DOP* 33 (1979) pp. 23-94.

<sup>31</sup> -M. Hamidullah, *Majmū'at al-wathā'iq al-siyyāsiyyāh lil-'ahd al-nabawi wa al-khilāfah al-rāshida*, (collection of the political documents which belong to the period of the prophet and the Guided Caliphs) (Beirut 1978) pp. 553-567. He used some manuscripts in Cairo (Dār al-Kutb al-Maṣrīah), which were originally found in the monastery in Saint Catharine in Sinai; the other one was kept and presumably used by the Armenian Church, and was reserved in Turkey, while the third part was written for the Coptic and kept in a monastery near Mardin. The last text is an expanded version of the conduct of Christian Arabs of Najrān. See S. G. Addai and R. Griveau (eds.) *Histoire Nestoire: Chronique de Seert*, II, Fasc. II, *PO* 13, pp. 610-617. It worth noting here that this alleged document has the number of 24 witnesses all from the close circle of Muḥammad's followers (including the names of the first four Muslim caliphs) something almost too good to be true.

chronological contradictions, and the wrong names and dates used in all of them, as Hamidallah pointed out,<sup>32</sup> are generally characterised by some specific features. Firstly, the wide range of religious freedom allocated for the non-Muslims, including the Christian slave-girls or concubines in the Muslim harems. Needless to say, all Muslim sources, as far as I know, are completely silent on this question. Furthermore, in these texts the Muslims were obliged not to take any material from Christian churches to build mosques, a practice which was known some decades after Muḥammad's death. In sum, these late texts, which are worth separate study, are Utopian Christian texts and may have been used against maltreatment on the part of some local Muslim emirs or even to mollify the nomadic tribes who used to attack the Christian monasteries.

After having gained control of most of the Arabian Peninsula, Muḥammad sought to extend his religion beyond its borders, so he sent envoys to the foreign rulers around him, calling them to convert to Islam. For this reason, he sent Diḥya b. Khalīfa al-Kalbī to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, Ḥaṭīb b. Abī Balta'a to the Muqauqis ruler of Alexandria,<sup>33</sup> Shujā' b. Wahb of b. Asd to al-Mundhir b. al-Ḥārith al-Ghassānī, who was the lord of Damascus, 'Amr b. Umayya al-Damrī to the Negus king of Abyssinia, and 'Abdullah b. Hudhāfa to Chosroes of Persia.<sup>34</sup> It was an ambitious and courageous attempt to spread Islam to other lands, and later it became an Islamic tradition to call upon non-Muslim rulers to embrace Islam, especially in the first year of the Caliph.<sup>35</sup> In fact these missions are under discussion and there are

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<sup>32</sup> - Hamidullah, *Majmū'at al-wathā'iq*, p. 560.

<sup>33</sup> -A. Butler, *Arab conquest of Egypt*, revised P.M. Fraser (Oxford University Press, 1978) p 140, n. 2.

<sup>34</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, pp. 652-659.

<sup>35</sup> - Ibn Abi al-Laith, *Lettre du Calife Hārūn Al-Rasīd à l'empereur Constantine VII*.



many contradictions between Islamic and Byzantine sources, as well as among modern scholars.

### **Muḥammad and Byzantium**

At this point, my main concern is the letters to Heraclius, patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria,<sup>36</sup> and al-Mundhir b. al-Ḥārith al-Ghassānī, the Arab ally of Byzantium. The oldest narrative of contacts between Heraclius and Muḥammad is in the traditions attributed to Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb (father of Mu‘āwiah I). According to this narrative, Abū Sufyān was in trade in Syria before his conversion to Islam, when the emperor Heraclius happened to be visiting Jerusalem after defeating the Persians, and he saw a vision of a kingdom of a circumcised man defeating Byzantium. Soon his followers told him that these were Jews who were under his sovereignty. They recommended killing all Jewish people.<sup>37</sup> At this very time the governor of Busrā told his master the news of the new prophet in Arabia, so the emperor ordered him to bring a man from the land of this prophet, and that happened to be Abū Sufyān.

In a strange dialogue between the Byzantine emperor and the Arab noble, the emperor enquired about Muḥammad, his career and the response of his people towards him. The Byzantine emperor eagerly asked about the character of the prophet, his lineage and the nature of his followers. Finally the emperor said “And truly, if you have told me the truth about him he will conquer me on the ground that is beneath my feet, and I wish that I were with him that I might wash his feet”.<sup>38</sup> However there is no other evidence from Byzantine sources about this meeting,

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<sup>36</sup> - A. Butler, ‘On the identity of Al-Mukaukas’, appendix C of idem, *The Arab conquest of Egypt*, pp. 508-526.

<sup>37</sup> - Sa‘īd b. al-Baṭrīq says that the emperor persecuted the Jews for their co-operation with the Persians. Sa‘īd b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Tārīkh*, II, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, pp. 654-655,

which seems to be legendary, since Abū Sufyān converted to Islam shortly after Muḥammad's final victory in Mecca (8 H/ 929 Ad)<sup>39</sup>, while Heraclius' visit to Jerusalem was in March 630 AD/ 9 H.<sup>40</sup>

It is remarkable that some Christian sources alluded to such a strong feeling of Heraclius of inevitable Arabs' victory. Agapius, a Christian Arab historian, wrote about Heraclius' view of the Arabs' victory as God's will, which nothing could stop, and a fulfilment of the divine promise to Abraham (Gen. 17: 20), that his son Ismā'īl (the father of the Arabs) would beget many kings.<sup>41</sup> Bar Hebraeus mentioned the same feeling of desperation and of fear of the Arabs.<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly enough, this narrative of Heraclius' sympathy towards Muslims and his vision about circumcised men defeating Byzantium, had some echoes in the Latin contemporary writings in Western Christian sources.<sup>43</sup>

The other Islamic narratives about the mission of Diḥya b. Khalīfa al-Kalbī to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius are full of variations,<sup>44</sup> but they mainly speak of a written and stamped letter which was sent to the emperor Heraclius with Diḥya.

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<sup>39</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, p 547.

<sup>40</sup> - W.E Kaegi, *Byzantium and the early Islamic conquests* (Cambridge 1995) p. 67.

<sup>41</sup> -Agapius al-Menbijī, *Kitāb al-'Unwān*, PO 8, Fasc. 3, pp. 471-473; The anonymous Egyptian contemporary writer (whose narrative had been used by Ben el-Muqffa') narrates a dream of the emperor that a circumcised nation will defeat Byzantium. He thought that this meant the Jews and began to persecute them and forced all of his Jews subjects to be baptised. We know from other sources that Byzantium had, at this very time, forced the Jews to convert to Christianity. Sevrus Ben el-Moqaffa, *Historia*, I:1, p. 107. On the conversion of Jews at this time, see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, p. 55 N. 6.

<sup>42</sup> -Bar Hebraeus , p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> -*The fourth book of the chronicle of Fredegar*, ed. and trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (London 1960) pp. 54- 55, (A Latin chronicle written around 650). Though it generally deals mainly with the events in the West, its comments on the East are of importance. See for more details, R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 216-219; For more about Heraclius' dream, see C. Donzel, 'The dream of Heraclius and Islam in an Ethiopian source', in Bakhit and Asfour, (eds.) *Bilād al-Shām during the Byzantine period*, 2, pp. 206-211.

<sup>44</sup> - For a full and careful examination of all the Muslim narratives of the embassy, see the study of S. Bashear, 'The mission of Diḥya al-Kalbī and the situation in Syria' *JSAI* 14 (1991) pp. 84-114.

" In the name of God most gracious most merciful, from Muḥammad the messenger of God to Heraclius the ruler of the Romans, peace for him who follows the guidance. I invite you by the convocation of Islam. Convert to Islam and you will be safe, submit and God will reward you twice. If you refuse, you will bear the sin of the Arīsyīn,<sup>45</sup> and Say O people of the Book! Come to the common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not from among ourselves Lords and protectors other than God; if they turn back, say: bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (Qur'ān 3,64)".<sup>46</sup>

The Muslim sources tend to exaggerate Heraclius' reaction to this message. Some even report that the emperor assembled all the great men and advised them to embrace Islam. Stunned by their furious reaction the emperor soon retreated claiming that he was just testing their Christian faith.<sup>47</sup> Although there are slight differences between all these Muslim narratives, all of them are unanimous about Heraclius' favourable response to Islam as a religion, and towards Muḥammad as a future prophet.

While most of the Western scholars cast strong doubts on the authenticity of Muḥammad's letters, for they build their discussions mainly on the wide confusion of the Arabic narratives concerning these missions, some of these narratives obviously tend to be no more than legends, and non-Muslim sources are silent.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> -An ambiguous word, Arabic sources give many meanings of it, but mainly it means peasants or subjects who follow other's lead. See S. Bashear, 'The mission' p.111.

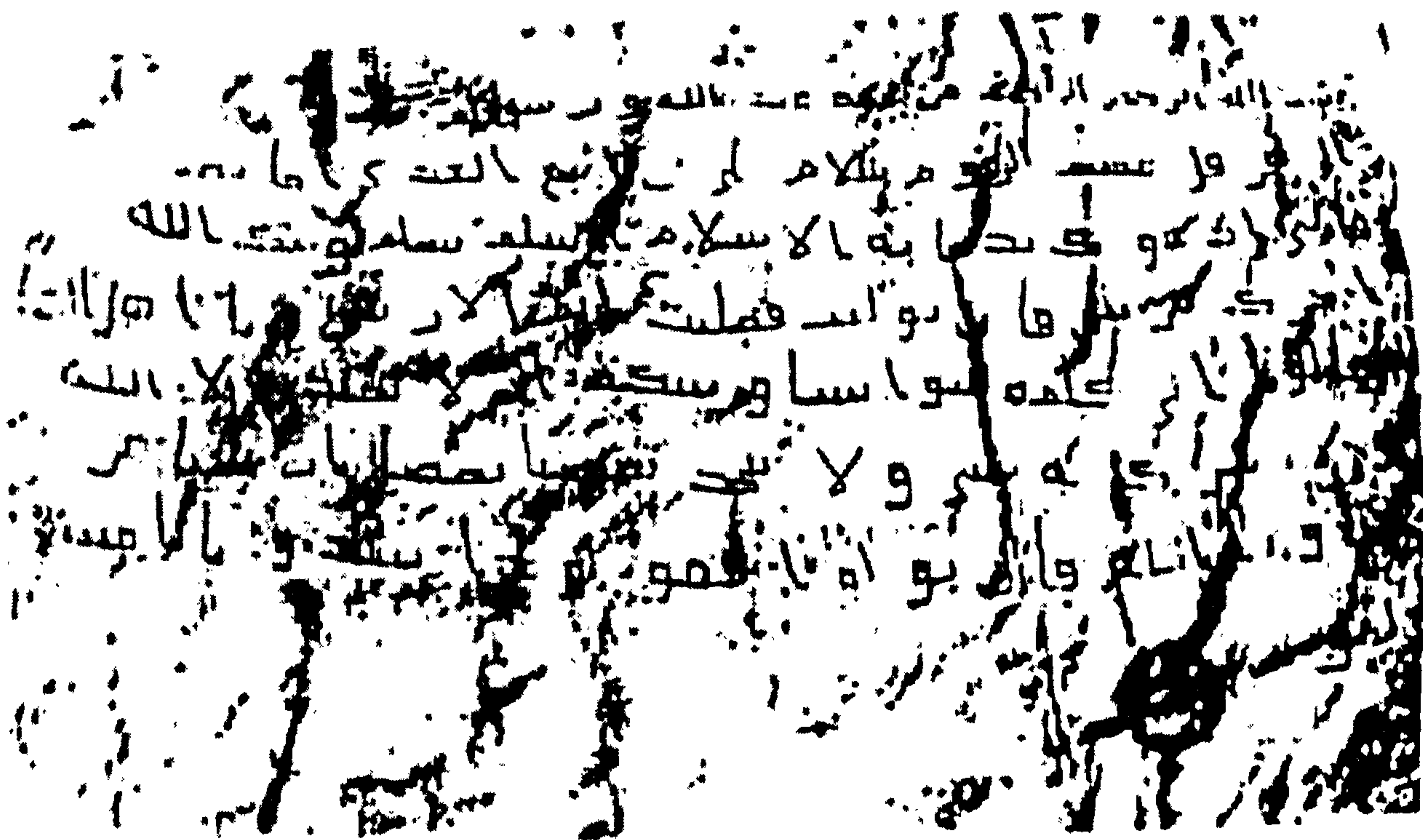
<sup>46</sup> -Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī fi sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8 vols. (Beirut 1989) 6, p, 137.

<sup>47</sup> -Ibn Ishāq, pp. 656-657; Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-tabaqāt al-kabīr* ed. E. Mittwoch, and E. Sachau, (Leiden 1917); al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'riḥ*, 3, pp. 1595-1598.

<sup>48</sup> - W.E. Kaegi, *Byzantium*, p. 69; S. Bashear 'The mission' passim; S. Gero, 'Early contacts between Byzantium and the Arab empire',. In favour of its authenticity, see M. Hamidulah, 'La lettre du prophète à Héraclius et le sort de l'original', *Arabica* 2 (1955) 97-110.

The examination of all the sources, however, may lead to another conclusions. Firstly, as Kaegi pointed out, there are no Byzantine narratives about such a message,<sup>49</sup> except the late narrative from Zonaras, about an alleged meeting between Muḥammad and Heraclius,<sup>50</sup> inasmuch as no other sources (Muslim or Christian) report any meeting of this kind. At least, however, some hints of the truth can still be found among all these sources (Muslim and non-Muslim).

In his collection of the political documents of the reign of the prophet and orthodox caliphs, Hamidullah published what he called the original copy of the prophet's letter to Heraclius (see photograph below). Unfortunately, he did not mention his sources. Recently the United Arab Emirates announced officially that its emir Zaid b. Sulṭān preserves this letter, and they promise to publish it.<sup>51</sup> Until this happens the authenticity of this document cannot be confirmed.



<sup>49</sup> - W.E. Kaegi, *Byzantium*, p.69.

<sup>50</sup> - Zonaras, *Epitomae Historiarum*, pp. 214-216.

<sup>51</sup> -Al-'Ittihād daily newspaper, (internet edition) <http://www.alittihad.co.ae>. Issue of 12-8-1998, accessed in 13-8-1998, and 16-8-1998.

<sup>52</sup> - M. Hamidullah, *Majmū'at al-wathā'iq*, p. 108.

Although one can accuse Islamic sources of exaggeration about Heraclius' favourable attitude to Islam, they do not hesitate to mention that some of the prophet's messengers were killed, or that his letter was torn up.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that Muḥammad sent a letter to Cyrus governor of Egypt, and received some gifts from him, including a Christian Egyptian slave-girl, called Maria, who converted to Islam, married the prophet and begot his only son Ibrāhīm (Abraham).<sup>54</sup> There are Christian sources: Sebeos the Armenian chronicler from the seventh century speaks of a letter from the Muslims (without identifying the sender), to Heraclius.<sup>55</sup>

It seems safe to assume that a letter had already been written and sent to the Byzantine authorities in Syria, probably to the local governor, and was later brought to the attention of the emperor during his visit to Jerusalem.

### **Earliest Byzantine contact with Islam**

Unfortunately, no contemporary sources give definite and confirmatory information, especially about the period from 622 (al-Hijra, emigration) to 629 A.D./7 H., which witnessed the battle of Mu'ta, the first military clash between Byzantium and Islam. Presumably, all these events in Arabia were known, or at least hinted at, in Syria. There was unprecedented news of a new prophet extending his preaching, as well as his power, beyond the core of the Arabian Peninsula. It is likely that this news was carried with the Arab trade caravans, which used to go to Syria every year.

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<sup>53</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allah* p. 658.

<sup>54</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, p. 653; al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'rikh* 3, p. 1061.

<sup>55</sup> -Sebēos, *Sebēos' History*, p.124

At the same time, Muḥammad had contacts with the Christian Arabs in Najrān in South Arabia, and they had some kind of relations with Byzantium.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore some of the Christian Arabs fled from Muḥammad to the Byzantine lands in Syria and certainly brought with them news of rumours of events in Arabia.<sup>57</sup> At this time, however, Heraclius was involved in his fatal struggle with the Persians, so any news of this kind, has it ever been brought to his attention, probably did not have any kind of priority, or any consideration.

The earliest contact between the Byzantines and the Muslims in which Islam was recognised as a religion appears in the story of conversion of Farwa b. ‘Amr al-Gadhāmī, the governor of Ma‘ān. Although the chronology of his conversion is unconfirmed, it is certain that he sent a letter to Muḥammad in 9 H/ 630 AD, in which he informs him about his conversion to Islam,<sup>58</sup> which must have taken place some months earlier. He was the first local governor who contacted Muslims in this way, apparently behind the back of the Byzantine authorities.<sup>59</sup> According to Islamic sources, he was arrested and later executed, then crucified. However, some Arabic sources, such as Ibn Sa‘d speaks of a personal attempt from Heraclius himself to convert him back. Having failed, the emperor ordered the death penalty for him.<sup>60</sup> This story, in spite of its chronological difficulties, shows the first ever Byzantine reaction to Islam as a religion.

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<sup>56</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, p. 271

<sup>57</sup> - Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, 1, p. 412.

<sup>58</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, p. 644; Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 1,II, p.31.

<sup>59</sup> - W. Kaegi, *Byzantium*, p.69.

<sup>60</sup> - Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 1,II, p.31.

Theophanes the Confessor, in his account of the battle of Mu'ta (September 629 AD / Jumāda 8 H.),<sup>61</sup> alluded to a sort of contact between the Quraysh, (Muḥammad's enemies) and the Byzantine local governor, concerning the news of the forthcoming Islamic attack on the southern Byzantine borders. This was a short time before Muḥammad's victorious entering into Mecca. This communication could actually be just an individual case; equally, however, it may indicate some kind of regular contact between the enemies of Muḥammad. What is clear from the above discussion is that Byzantium, or at least its local authorities, especially the Arabic tribes, were to some extent aware of the events in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula. There was no Byzantine reaction to these remote and seemingly less dangerous events for the exhausted Byzantine armies. Both sides, therefore, Muslims and Byzantines, were at a distance from each other, involved in fighting against their enemies.

### **The military confrontation**

In 629/ 8 H., Byzantium and the Islamic state were confronting each other. Byzantium was trying to re-establish its rule in Egypt, Syria and Palestine, while Muḥammad thought his power was enough to make a limited but dangerous test of Byzantine military power in the Arabian borders. Therefore, he sent the first Islamic army against Byzantine borders. This expedition met with disaster at M'uta and was badly defeated in the same year, 629 AD/ 8 H.<sup>62</sup>

The second Islamic expedition against the southern borders of Byzantium aimed at Tabūk, in Rajab 630 AD/ 9 H., under Muḥammad's command. There was no fighting, only an agreement between Muslims and Arab tribes around Tabūk in

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<sup>61</sup> - W. Kaegi, *Byzantium*, p.72.

the north of Arabia.<sup>63</sup> Al-Wāqidī also reports that Heraclius sent a special Arab messenger to Muḥammad in Tabūk to find out more about his character and examine him as the expected future prophet.<sup>64</sup>

Although S. Bashear says "*the reports concerning Hiraql's attitude to Muḥammad in Tabūk may shed some light on the reason why that expedition was called off*",<sup>65</sup> these later reports on such events, seem to be no more than legends. The Byzantine submissiveness to the Muslims also appears to be improbable in the light of the decisive Byzantine victory over the Muslims in M'uta just a few months before.

### **Islam and local Christians in Syria and Egypt**

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to deal with the military struggle between Byzantium and the Muslims, which began on a large scale soon after Muḥammad's death in 632. This conflict took its course mainly in the lands where the majority of the population was Arabic speaking, and mostly Christian. So these people and their land were a battleground in the Islamic-Byzantine conflict, as well as in the major encounters between the three divine religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The attitude of these people situated between Byzantium and the Islamic state, between Islam and Christianity, actually is a complex issue, is heterogeneous containing three religions, and several different languages (Greek, Syriac and Arabic). There were even bitter divisions within Christianity itself. This will be the starting point of my next discussion.

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<sup>62</sup> -Ibn Ishāq, pp. 531-540; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, p. 335<sup>10-25</sup>, English trans. Mango, p. 466. For further discussion, see W. Kaegi, *Byzantium*, pp. 71-74.

<sup>63</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, pp. 602-608.

<sup>64</sup> -Al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-maghāzī lil-Wāqidī* (Al-wāqdi's book of conquests) ed. J. Marsden, 3 vols (Oxford University Press 1966) 3, pp. 1018-1019.

<sup>65</sup> - S. Bashear, 'The Mission', p. 94.



When Islamic armies entered Palestine, the Byzantine authorities were merely restoring the eastern provinces and trying to solve the permanent and complex problem of the nature of Christ. Heraclius personally tried, with the support of Sergios patriarch of Constantinople (610-638), to pacify the Monophysites in the east.<sup>66</sup> However his new formula (Monotheletism) did not solve the problem and the disagreement between the Chalcedonians (supported by the Emperor) and the local Monophysites left a bitter feeling of depression and hatred among these populations, which appears clearly in the contemporary sources. John of Nikiu, the Egyptian chronicler, says that the “hostility of the population to the emperor Heraclius was because of the persecution”.<sup>67</sup> Another late Syrian text bitterly complains “the cathedral churches, which had been unjustly confiscated from our people by Heraclius and given to his co-religionaries, the Chalcedonians”.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the disharmony between the local population and the Byzantine authorities was clear and went very deep, which is attributable to several factors. These factors were religious debates,<sup>69</sup> a growing feeling of independent identity (especially in Egypt), and administrative tax problems.

My aim here is to understand the attitude of these populations (that is the local populations) to Islam, as a religion, although assessing their attitude is not

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<sup>66</sup> -J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine empire* (Oxford 1991) pp 9-24.

<sup>67</sup> - John of Nikiu, *The chronicle*, p. 184.

<sup>68</sup> -Extract from the anonymous chronicle of 1234 AD, in: A. Palmer et al. (ed.) *The seventh century in the west Syrian chronicles* (Liverpool University Press 1993) p. 141.

<sup>69</sup>-See for more details: J. Moorhead ‘The Monophysite response to the Arab invasions’ *B* 51 (1981) 579-91. A. Cameron, ‘The eastern provinces in the seventh century AD: Hellenism and the emergence of Islam’ in idem: *Changing cultures in early Byzantium*, Variorum (London 1996); A. N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the seventh century*, 5 vols. (Amsterdam 1968-1980) II, pp 117-127; H. Kennedy, ‘Change and continuity in Syria and Palestine at the time of the Moslem conquest’, *Aram*, I: II (1989) p. 265; J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the seventh century*, pp. 286-289.

without risks, because of the wide contradictions in all contemporary and late sources. There are no eyewitnesses among the Islamic sources. It is well known that the earliest Islamic historical writings began in the second half of the eighth century; while in the seventh century there was lack of Byzantine historical sources. The main outlines can be drawn mainly from the other oriental historians, Jews, Syrian, Copts, and Armenians, from whom one can find a wide range of different attitudes to Islam.

As for the Jews, although the beginning of the Islamic-Jewish relations was violent during Muḥammad's life, all contemporary sources agree that there was co-operation between Jews and Muslims, and that the Jews rejoiced at the new prophet. *Doctrina Jacobi* speaks of the Jews' joy at Muḥammad's news "Και έσχαμεν οί Τουδαίοι χαραν μεγαλήν".<sup>70</sup> The Armenian historian Sebeos accused the Jews of calling the Arabs to help them against the Romans.<sup>71</sup> Al-Balādhurī also confirms the intimacy between Arabs and Jews, and tells us that they were spies for the Arab armies in Palestine.<sup>72</sup> The most interesting text is the Judaic messianic apocalyptic vision concerning Islam, and Muḥammad as the expected Messiah:

When he saw the kingdom of Ishmael that was coming, he began to say: 'Was it not enough, what the wicked kingdom of Edom did to us, but we must have the kingdom of Ishmael too?'... for the Holy One, Blessed be He, only brings the kingdom of Ishmael in order to save you from this wickedness. He raises up over them a Prophet according to his will and will conquer the land for them and they will come and restore it in greatness, and there will be great terror between them and

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<sup>70</sup> - *Doctrina Jacobi*, p. 209. For further discussion on the Jews' attitude towards Arabic invasions of Palestine, see S. Leder, 'The attitude of the Jews and their role towards the Arab-Islamic conquest of Bilad al-Sham', *Die Welt des Orients* 18 (1987) pp. 67-71. On the Jewish sources and Islam, see R. Hoylnad, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 307-320.

<sup>71</sup> - Sebeos, *History*, p. 122.

<sup>72</sup> - Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, pp. 162-163, English trans., P. Hitti, p. 244.

the sons of Essau'. Rabbi Simon answered and said: 'How do we know that they are our salvation?' He answered: ' Did not the prophet Isaiah say thus: " And he saw a troop with a pair of horsemen, etc"?'<sup>73</sup> Why did he put the troop of asses before the troop of camels?<sup>74</sup>

This brief and very important text summarises the early Judaic concept of Islam, as a kingdom of Ishmael. This seems to be the exact interpretation of the biblical text about God's promise for Ishmael.<sup>75</sup> It was the first ever connection between Islam and Biblical verse " the rider on camels" i.e. the Muslims, who came after " the riders on asses" i.e. Christians. Who was the rider on the ass who came first, and who was the rider on the camel who came after? Was the first meant to be Christ? And was the second meant to be Muḥammad? The interpretation of these questions became the most critical points in Islamic-Christian polemics. Theophanes, also, says "The Hebrews were misled and thought he (Muḥammad) was the Anointed one".<sup>76</sup>

Apparently, some Judaic narratives described 'Umar, the second Islamic caliph, as a messiah. P. Crone and M. Cook ascribed this idea about 'Umar to the Islamic tradition, depending on the narrative of al-Ṭabarī. They say "it is to be found fossilised in the Islamic tradition, and incidentally reveals to us the identity of the messiah himself, 'Umar, the second caliph".<sup>77</sup> But the text of al-Ṭabarī referred only to a comment of a certain Jew who had recently converted to Islam, and who in the same text was accused by 'Umar of being nearer to his former religion.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> -Isaiah, 21, 7.

<sup>74</sup> - B. Lewis, 'An apocalyptic vision of Islamic history ', *BSOAS* (1950) pp. 321-322.

<sup>75</sup> - Genesis, 18: 20

<sup>76</sup> - Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, p. 333<sup>3-13</sup>, English translation, C. Mango and R. Scott, p. 464.

<sup>77</sup> - Crone, P. and Cook M .A., *Hagarism: The making of Islamic world*, (Cambridge University Press 1977), p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'rikh*, 1:5, pp. 2408-2409.

In conclusion, it appears that Jews saw the emergence of Islam and its prophet as some kind of salvation for them from the yoke of the Roman rule and thought that the Arabs could help them to rebuild their holy temple in Jerusalem and maybe that Muḥammad was the expected messiah, who could restore the glory of the kingdom of Israel.<sup>79</sup> But since the attitude of the Arabs towards the Jews was the same as their attitude to Christians, these good relations soon changed. According to Sebeos, Arabs “named the same building (The Temple) their own place of prayer”, so the Jews plotted to “fill Jerusalem with blood”, by polluting the mosque with pigs’ blood, and then ascribing this to the Christians, but this plan was discovered.<sup>80</sup> It is noteworthy that this story, if it is true, is the earliest example of defilement of the holy places carried out by Muslims and Christians. This story is often repeated in other Christian-Muslim encounters. Later the Jews gave up their hope of Muḥammad as a messiah.<sup>81</sup>

When one looks at the attitude of the majority of the populations of Syria and Egypt towards Islam, one has to take into consideration certain points which affected their reaction. Firstly, the religious divisions in the east, between the local Monophysites and the (mainly Greek) Chalcedonians,<sup>82</sup> which lift much bitterness in the east. Secondly, one should consider what they must have thought after the emperor had left them facing the Arabs, taking with him the holy cross, the most

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<sup>79</sup> - Sebeos, History, p. 131.

<sup>80</sup> -Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> -"But you know well that the Jews are infidels, utterly rejected, who expect and desire the coming of Antichrist; with him they will be condemned" these words came from the message attributed to ‘Umar II to the Emperor Leo III. It describes clearly the contradiction between the Jews and the Muslims about the Messiah. See J. Gaudeul ‘The correspondence between Leo and ‘Umar’, p.143.

<sup>82</sup> -Severus b. al-Muqaffa’ (who used the work of an eyewitness) speaks in detail about the maltreatment by the Byzantine authorities in Egypt against the Coptic who opposed the council of Chalcedon, Severus b. al-Muqaffa’, *Tārīkh*, I: 1, pp. 106-107; John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, p.186.

sacred relic of Christianity. A clear example of the Egyptians' feeling towards the Chalcedonians appears in the bitter words of John of Nikiu:

“They defiled the church by an unclean faith, and they wrought apostasies and deeds of violence like the sect of Arians, such as neither pagan nor barbarian has wrought, they have despised Christ and his servants, and we have not found only that do the like amongst the worshippers of false idols”.<sup>83</sup>

Still, although most of the non-Muslim sources speak about Arab violence everywhere, and the merciless invaders,<sup>84</sup> it seems that the Arab violence was directed mainly against the Greek population.<sup>85</sup> This violence forced most of the Greeks to leave their cities and flee to Byzantium. Consequently, the new Arab rulers found many empty houses everywhere, providing a good opportunity to settle new Arab Muslim tribes in these places.<sup>86</sup> This demographic change helps to spread Islam and increased the process of Arabization and Islamization of the new provinces, although it did take some time.

In his article, D. J. Constantelos says “The Arabic wars against the Greeks were not only political or economic wars, but crusades or holy wars of Islam as a

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<sup>83</sup> -John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, p 187; Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: I, p. 107, who attributes the Arabic victory to the problem of the council of Chalcedon.

<sup>84</sup> -Sebeos, *History*, p.129; John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, p. 182, 188; Antonios Chozebites, *Vita St. Georgii Chozebitae*, AB 7 (1888) pp.127-130; Sophronios of Jerusalem, *Orationes, Oratio I*, PG 87: 3, cols. 3205- 3207; see the discussion of D. J. Constantelos who tends to assume that the Muslim conquests were mainly a process of bloodshed, D. J. Constantelos, 'The Moslem conquests of the near east as revealed in the Greek sources of the seventh and the eighth centuries' B 42 (1972) 325-357. His theory was challenged by R. Schick, *The Christian communities of Palestine from Byzantium to Islamic rule: A historical and archaeological study*, (Studies in the late antiquity and early Islam, 2) (Princeton, 1995) pp. 69-80. Schick, using the Muslim sources and archaeological evidences presumes that the Muslim forces did not commit such widespread violence.

<sup>85</sup> - John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, p. 184, Agabius, p. 478. See R. Schick, *The Christian communities of Palestine*, pp. 68-84.

<sup>86</sup> - Al-Balādhurī, *futūḥ al-buldān*, pp. 152-153, 155, 224, English trans., P. Hitti, pp. 227, 231, 349.

religion against Christianity”.<sup>87</sup> But such an opinion is evidently based on exaggeration and generalisation. Constantelos collected all the negative phrases from all sources, and had a fixed idea before writing his article. An issue like this is complex and cannot be generalised. From the same sources that he used, one can draw a totally opposite account. John of Nikiu pointed out the Arabic tolerance towards churches,<sup>88</sup> and the conversion of some Egyptians to Islam,<sup>89</sup> and actually said “people began to help the Muslims”.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, most contemporary sources say that the Arabs mainly respected the churches and the religious practices of all Christian sects. However this does not mean that the Arabic expeditions against the Byzantine eastern provinces were entirely peaceful.

Finally, it is not so easy a task to evaluate the attitude of ordinary people in Syria and Egypt, in the light of lack or contradictory sources. It seems, however, that in the early stage of Arab conquests the majority of the local population (except the Jews) were fighting side by side with the Byzantines, but after the first clashes, some of the Arab tribes in Syria and Palestine began to side with their own people, at least in the battle.<sup>91</sup> Having won victories over the Byzantines, Arabs began some missionary work, mainly with the Christian Arabs in the new Arab provinces.<sup>92</sup> Yet Arabs were apparently keen to distinguish between the local Christian population and the Greeks, so that while we know many examples of co-

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<sup>87</sup> - Constantelos, ‘The Moslem conquests of the near east’, p. 328.

<sup>88</sup> - John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, p. 200.

<sup>89</sup> - John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, p. 182, 201.

<sup>90</sup> - John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, p. 181

<sup>91</sup> - Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 140, English trans, P. Hitti, pp. 208-209.

<sup>92</sup> - Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 150, English trans., P. Hitti, p. 223.

operation between local Christians and Muslims,<sup>93</sup> we also have many examples of the flight of Greek populations to other Byzantine lands.

At the same time, Muslims allowed all Christian sects, indiscriminately, to practise their religion, and keep their own churches.<sup>94</sup> However, as D. Sahas pointed out recently, Islam as a religion was basically ignored by these local Christians or, at best, treated as a Christian heresy.<sup>95</sup> Accordingly, a process of Arabization and Islamization of the new Islamic provinces in Jordan, Syria and Egypt, had already begun soon after the establishment of Arab rule, so these lands had begun slowly to lose some of their Hellenic features. At the same time, al-Jizya undoubtedly pushed some Christians to Islam.<sup>96</sup>

### **The church and Islam**

The Christian laity somehow had to live in the changing society, under new rulers, and ignore Islam or accept it, even as a Christian heresy. But the situation of the Christian thinkers was completely different and more sophisticated. At this time they were involved in the problem of the nature of Christ, divided into bitterly opposed groups, which affected both the state and the church. It was a society dominated by religion and religious characteristics and interpretation coloured almost all aspects of life.

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<sup>93</sup> - Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, pp. 128, 143, English trans P. Hitti, pp. 187, 210-211; John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, p.181-182, 201.

<sup>94</sup> - Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, pp. 128, 132, 136, 178, English trans P. Hitti, pp. 187, 192, 198, 271. John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, p. 194; Ishō'yahb III, (of Adiabene) *liber Epistularum*, ed. and trans. R. Duval, CSCO, *Scriptores Syri*, second series, LXIV, (Paris 1905) p. 182; see H. Kennedy, 'The Melkite church from the Islamic conquest to the Crusades: Continuity and adaptation in the Byzantine Legacy', Seventh International Byzantine congress, Major Papers (New York, 1986) p. 328; S. P. Brock, 'Syriac views of emergence Islam', in idem, *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, literature, theology*, Variorum (London 1992).

<sup>95</sup> - D. Sahas, 'The Seventh century', p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> - On the issue of conversion see R. Schick, *The Christian communities of Palestine*, pp. 139-158.

Now Islam came as a religious challenge to the Christian theologians, considering itself the true and the last religion, refuting their Bible and the main basis of the Christian dogma. Muḥammad announced that he was the last prophet and that the Bible prophesies about him. The main issue of the emergence of Islam as a religion was its image as a new religion accompanied by Muslim victories over the Christian Byzantine Empire; everywhere in the east, Jerusalem, and the holy places fell under Muslim grasp. And certainly many Christians were killed or had to leave their houses and flee to Byzantine lands.

Many questions arose at this time concerning Muslims. Who were these people? What was their so-called religion? Who was this prophet? Did the Bible foretell these events? Was this a temporary distress, and, most important question of all, whom did God support, Believers or infidels? Undoubtedly in the seventh century most of the Christian writers did not distinguish between Islam and Arabs. They saw Arabs and later Muslims as "barbarian beasts" and idolaters.<sup>97</sup>

It is well known that the first ever Christian writer to write about Islam was Sophronios of Jerusalem (634-638). In his sermon in Jerusalem in 637, only five years after Muḥammad's death, and the capitulation of the city to the caliph, 'Umar, by Sophronios himself. He described the situation, and gave his explanation of the Muslim victory thus:

Because of countless sins and very serious faults, we have become unworthy of the sight of these things, (the sights of Bethlehem) and are prevented from entering Bethlehem by way of roads. Unwillingly, indeed contrary to our wishes, we are required to stay at home, not

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<sup>97</sup> -John of Nikiu, p. 201; Sophronios, *Oratio*, PG 87,3, col. 3206; W.E. Kaegi, 'Initial Byzantine reactions to the Arab conquest', *Church History*, 38 (1969) p. 140; E. M. Jeffreys 'The image of the Arabs in Byzantine literature', *The 17th International Byzantine Congress, Major Papers*, (Washington 1986).



closed by bodily bonds but by fear of Saracens, and we are prevented from experiencing such heavenly joy ... but we have the Davidic desire and thirst, to see [the water] as David did famous in song, and we are prevented from feasting our souls through fear of the Saracens alone. For now the slime of godless Saracens, like gentiles at that time, has captured Bethlehem and does not yield passage, but threatens slaughter and destruction if we leave this holy city and if we dare we approach our beloved and sacred Bethlehem.<sup>98</sup>

He also spoke bitterly about the Arab swords, which, in his opinion, were bloodthirsty, and caused much fear. Yet he believed and hoped that the salvation of the Christians would be accomplished only by self-purification:

Therefore I call on and I beg you for the love of Christ the lord, in so far as it is in our power, let us correct ourselves, let us shine forth with repentance, let us be purified by conversion and let us curb our performance of acts which are hateful to God. If we constrain ourselves, as friendly and beloved of God, we will laugh at the fall of our Saracen adversaries and we will view their not distant death, and we will see their final destruction, for their blood-loving blade will enter their hearts, their bows will be shattered and their shafts will be fixed in them.<sup>99</sup>

Again, the patriarch gave his evaluation of the Muslim victory, ascribing it to Christian sins, and considering it as a temporary ordeal, which could be put behind them by praying and repentance.<sup>100</sup> He also was trying to confirm that God

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<sup>98</sup> -Sophronios, *Oratio*, PG. 87,3.col. 3206, English translation, Kaegi, 'Initial Byzantine reactions', pp. 139-140. C.f. Hoyland, R. *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 67-73.

<sup>99</sup> -Sophronios, *Oratio* 1, PG., 87,3, cols. 3205-3206, partial English translation, Kaegi, 'Initial Byzantine reactions', pp. 140-141.

<sup>100</sup> -Sophronios, *Oratio* 1, PG 87,3, cols. 3205-3206. It is noteworthy that the very same explanation for the Muslim victories appeared also in Western Christian writings. See F. Engreen, 'Pope John the Eighth and the Arabs', *Speculum* 20: 3 (Jul. 1945) pp. 318-330. esp. p. 320.

did not desert his believers (i.e. the Christians), and that it was a divine punishment, but that God certainly did not support those godless Arabs.

This adjective, he used “godless” betrays clearly his misunderstanding of Islam, which could also be a reaction to Islamic attitudes towards the principal Christian basics, mainly the divinity of Christ.

Although the first Christian apology against Islam did not appear until the first half of the eighth century, the few Christian pieces written about Islam in the seventh century coloured and set up the main basis of the following apologies and recriminations between the theologians on both sides. The writings and sermons of Sophronios were the initial Christian explanation of the emergence of Islam.

Presumably, Sophronios did not consider Islam as a religion, and did not have any kind of information about it. Theophanes tells us about the comment of Sophronios, when he saw ‘Umar entering Jerusalem in cheap and simple Arabic clothes, "Verily, this is the abomination of the desolation standing in a holy place, as have been spoken through the prophet Daniel".<sup>101</sup> It was the first attempt to find an interpretation in the Bible of the phenomenon of Islam. The patriarch interpreted the new Islamic power as the fourth beast in Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7). A few years afterwards the Armenian historian, Sebeos, says “This fourth (beast) emerged from the south and represents the Ishmaelite kingdom”.<sup>102</sup>

### **The patriarch John and the prince of the Arabs**

Both Muslims and Christian theologians tried to find some kind of prophetic support from the Bible, in particular the Old Testament. They wrote different interpretations of the biblical text, to refute the authenticity of the opposite

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<sup>101</sup> - Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, p. 339<sup>22-24</sup>, English trans., C. Mango, and R. Scott, p. 47; Daniel 9:27, 11:31,12; Matthew 24:15, 1.

scripture. One can assume that the patriarch Sophronios took the first step in this context, just a few years after Muḥammad's death.

Some years after Sophronios' writings, the first known dialogue between a Muslim emir and a Christian patriarch took place in a certain city in Syria. It was a Syriac text, translated and published by M. F. Nau.<sup>103</sup> In this unique text, we do not find the names of the interlocutors,<sup>104</sup> or the name of the place of the debate, nor its date. All we have are attempts from Nau to confirm the authenticity of the text in opposition to the late Egyptian scholar M. H. al-Bakrī who refuted its authenticity.<sup>105</sup>

The text itself begins, "The letter of Mar John, patriarch, concerning the discussion which he had with the emir of the Hagarenes",<sup>106</sup> and ends with "Pray for the famous emir ... the holy father... and Mar John and all of their holy escort and the leaders and the believers, who are assembled together with us".<sup>107</sup> Hence the writer is clearly not Mar John. However, Nau identified the name of the Islamic emir as 'Umr b. al-'Ās (conqueror of Egypt), and the patriarch is the Jacobite John I (635-648). Recently S. K. Samir argued that that the Muslim interlocutor was a certain Muslim called 'Umar Ibn Sa'd.<sup>108</sup> More important is the narrative of Ibn al-Nadīm, in which he speaks of a certain Coptic bishop called John the Grammarian,

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<sup>102</sup> - Sebeos, *History*, p. 135.

<sup>103</sup> - M. F. Nau, 'Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens', *JS*, IIe serie 5 (1915) pp. 225-279. English translation in: N.A. Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue: a collection of documents from the first three Islamic centuries (632-900)* pp. 7-47. For further discussion, see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 459-465.

<sup>104</sup> - Although the title and the first line of the text bear the name of John, the context betrays, beyond questioning that the writer of the text is not John himself but someone else. The writer repeatedly says, "Our father said ...".

<sup>105</sup> - M. H. al-Bakrī, 'Muḥāwarat al-baṭrīq Yūḥanā ma'a amīr al-'Arab', (Dialogue between the patriarch John and the emir of the Arabs) *Bulletin of the faculty of arts: Cairo University*, 16: 1 (May 1954) pp. 23-45.

<sup>106</sup> - M. F. Nau, 'Un colloque', p. 257, English trans. N. A. Newman, p. 24.

<sup>107</sup> - M. F. Nau, 'Un colloque', pp. 263- 264, English trans. N. A. Newman, pp. 27-28.

who rejected the idea of the Trinity, and he was consequently excommunicated, living alone until the Islamic armies entered Egypt. After a while he befriended the new emir ‘Umr b. al-‘Ās.<sup>109</sup> Obviously, however such man could not be identified as a patriarch and a Christian interlocutor against Muslim objections.

However, the dialogue contains some questions from the Arabic emir to the patriarch, about religious issues, such as the Bible, the nature of Christ, the religion of Abraham and Moses, and surprisingly a strange question from the Muslim emir: “he requested only proof that Christ is God and that he was born of the Virgin”<sup>110</sup> Such a question as this (especially the first part of it), which completely contradicts the Qurā’nic text,<sup>111</sup> casts some doubt on the authenticity of the whole text,<sup>112</sup> and suggests that the Christian writer at this time (whenever it was) seemed to be unacquainted with the Islamic concept of Jesus Christ. Moreover, no contemporary writer, especially John of Nikiu and Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥākam, reported any dialogue like this. We have a different repercussion of this dialogue in the *al-Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, who portrays a certain Christian interlocutor as someone who changed his idea of the Trinity, and had several discussions with the Muslim emir, but he does not confirm his conversion to Islam.<sup>113</sup>

These early religious dialogues between the local Christian population and the Muslims are extremely likely to have occurred. This dialogue however seems to be a later interpolation, or at best, an inaccurate late record of an earlier dialogue.

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<sup>108</sup> - S. K Samir, ‘Qui est l’interlocuteur musulman du patriarche syrien Jean III (631-648)’, in Dijvers et al., (eds.) *IV Symposium Syriacum, OCA 229* (1987) pp. 387-400.

<sup>109</sup> - Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>110</sup> - M. F Nau, ‘Un colloque’, p. 258, English trans. N. A. Newman, p. 25

<sup>111</sup> - It is unquestionable that the Qur’ān says that Mary is the mother of Christ. Qur’ān 19: 14- 22.

<sup>112</sup> - M. Ḥ. al-Bakrī discussed in detail mistakes in the translation of the text from Syrian into French, which confirmed his ideas about the text.

<sup>113</sup> - Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 254.

However, the presence of Chalcedonians in this Dialogue may put it somewhere in the context of early Byzantine-Muslim relations.

The second Christian thinker who dealt with the phenomenon of Islam is Maximus the Confessor.<sup>114</sup> In the fourth decade of the seventh century,<sup>115</sup> Maximus saw Arabs as nothing but wild beasts in human form, coming from the desert to destroy civilised society. He speaks bitterly about those who are suffering and frightened of the Arab invasions.<sup>116</sup> At the same time Maximus considered the events of the Arabic conquests as a foreboding of the antichrist.<sup>117</sup> It is another step in the process of the formulation of Byzantine views of Islam, which had begun in the seventh century, and later appeared in systematic anti-Islam polemics in the eighth century.<sup>118</sup>

Doctrina Jacobi is one of the earliest Christian texts, which refers to Muḥammad (but does not mention his name), and examines Islam as a religion. It was a conversation between a Jew, Jacob who recently converted to Christianity and some of his friends. This dialogue is dated around 646/647.<sup>119</sup> In this conversation:

Master Jacob, my brother Abraham wrote to me from Caesarea saying that a deceiving prophet appeared among the Saracens.. .... The Jews have a great happiness, they say that the coming (ερχόμενος) prophet

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<sup>114</sup> -I have chosen only selected works within the context of Byzantine-Muslim relations. For a full and lengthy study of the early Christian writings on Islam, see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*.

<sup>115</sup> - W. Kaegi, 'The initial Byzantine reaction', p. 142

<sup>116</sup> - Maximus, *PG* 91, col. 540 A; c.f. W. Kaegi, 'The initial Byzantine reaction', p. 142; Constantelos, 'The Moslem conquests', p. 232; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 76-78.

<sup>117</sup> - Maximus, *PG* 91, col. 540 B.

<sup>118</sup> -John of Damascus called Muslims "The forerunners of antichrist", John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus*, cols. 764, trans. D. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 133.

<sup>119</sup> -It was commonly believed that this dialogue was written about 634, but G. Dagron proved that it could be in 646 /647, depending on some chronological points in the text. See G. Dagron, 'Doctrina Jacobi, commentaire', p. 231; P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism*, p.3.

has appeared midst the Saracens, and he is proclaiming the advent of the messiah and the Christ, and having arrived in Sykamina, I referred the matter to an old man very well-informed in the Scriptures, and I asked him: 'What do you tell me, master and teacher, about the prophet who has appeared among the Saracens?. He told me, with much groaning, 'He is deceiving, for the prophets do not come with sword and chariot'. Truly these events of today are works of confusion. But you go off, master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared'. So I, Abraham, made enquiries, and was told by those who met him: 'There is no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only bloodshed; for he says he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible'<sup>120</sup>.

This unique text reveals the earliest ever Judaic and Christian impressions of Islam as a religion, and of Muḥammad. At the same time it makes more extensive points about the context of Muslim-Christian polemics, which took on a methodical form later in the next century.

Firstly, this dialogue reflects the initial Judaic perception about Muḥammad as a messiah, which was used later in Islamic-Byzantine polemics, that some "people of the book" have realised that Muḥammad is the prophet, whom they were expecting, so some of them converted to Islam. This favourable attitude on the part of some Jews appeared exactly in the Qur'ān "Is it not a sign to them that the learned of the Children of Israel knew it (as true) "(10:46).

It is noteworthy that the Christian polemicists used every point in this text later. It is the repeated Christian polemical question: How could a prophet be a

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<sup>120</sup> -Doctrina Jacobi, pp. 209-211. See P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 3-4; W. Kaegi, 'The initial Byzantine reaction', pp. 141-142; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 55-61.

military leader?<sup>121</sup> The idea of the keys of paradise has been connected later with the Islamic term Jihad, and appeared later in the Byzantine anti-Islamic polemics.<sup>122</sup>

Another Christian thinker who wrote about Islam was Anastasius of Sinai, a "neo-Chalcedonian who devoted most of his works against Monophysitism".<sup>123</sup> As a Christian thinker, he, like most of his contemporaries, saw the emergence of Islam as a punishment of the Christians for their sins.<sup>124</sup> As for Islam, "Anastasius brings the Qur'ān's Christology into his argument with the Monophysites".<sup>125</sup> He seems to have some knowledge about Islamic doctrine concerning the Trinity. In his *Hodegos*, he condemns the Muslim accusations against the Christian doctrine concerning the Trinity and the nature of Christ as a Son of God, but he soon turns his attack upon the Monophysites.<sup>126</sup> Actually, he, in common with his contemporaries, did not consider Islam a religion. He also did not mention Muḥammad. At the same time he was aware of some Islamic attitudes towards the Trinity, and he claims that these Arabic ideas about Christ "were formed in reaction to the formulae of the Severian Monophysites".<sup>127</sup>

Byzantine hagiography in the seventh century does not offer more information or impressions concerning Islam. Antonios Chozebites the biographer of Saint George Chozebites, speaks of Arabic invasions of Palestine. He says that

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<sup>121</sup> - Abū Qurra, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq*, p. 246.

<sup>122</sup> -Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, p. 334<sup>20-25</sup>, English trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, p.465; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, p. 79.

<sup>123</sup> -J. Haldon, 'The works of Anastasius of Sinai: A key source for the history of the seventh-century east Mediterranean society and belief', in: A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (eds.) *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East I, problems in the literary sources material*, (Princeton 1992) p. 115.

<sup>124</sup> -Anastasios Sinaites, *PG* 89, 1156 C. See Haldon, 'The works of Anastasius of Sinai', pp. 115-116

<sup>125</sup> - S. H Griffith and R. Darling, 'Anastasius of Sinai: The Monophysites and the Qur'ān', *Eighth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstracts of papers* (Chicago 1982) p.13.

<sup>126</sup> -Anastasio Sinaitae, *Viae Dux*, ed. K. Uthemann, (Brepols 1981) I, 45-50, p. 9.

<sup>127</sup> - S. H Griffith and Robin Darling, 'Anastasius of Sinai', p. 13.

Arabs killed some monks, but at the same time they showed some mercy to the saint, because of their fear of God, and they offered him food.<sup>128</sup>

The Syrian and Armenian writers in the seventh century, however, offer more accurate information about Islam,<sup>129</sup> and most of them had some kind of non-hostile attitude to Islam, at least compared with other Greek sources. However, the complete evaluation of Syrian and Armenian views on the emergence of Islam is not my aim here.<sup>130</sup>

One of the most important Syriac texts from the seventh century is the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodios.<sup>131</sup> This unique text takes the form of a brief universal history, divided into seven millennia, running from the fall of Adam to the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>132</sup> The author tries to deal with the phenomenon of Islam, and expresses his hope for a sudden and total Byzantine victory over the Muslims, in which all the Muslims would be "Given over to the sword and devastation, to captivity and slaughter".<sup>133</sup>

This text, in my opinion, can be considered as an early genuine Christian polemical attempt against Islam as a religion. It has some polemical features, and the writer was aware of the earliest issues between Islam and Christianity, which became the backbone of all the debates between the Christian and the Muslim

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<sup>128</sup> -Antonios Chozebites, 'Vita St. Georgii Chozebitae', pp. 129-130; see D. J. Constantelos, 'The Moslem conquests', p. 232.

<sup>129</sup> -S. Brock, 'Syriac views of emergent Islam', p. 11.

<sup>130</sup> - For further discussions, see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 116-213.

<sup>131</sup> - Pseudo-Methodios to whom the text is attributed, was a Bishop of Olympus (martyred 312), the text itself, as S. Brock pointed out, belongs to the second half of the seventh century and its original language was Syriac. Pseudo-Methodios, *Apocalypse*, see A. Palemer et al., *The seventh century in the west-Syrian chronicles*, introduction, pp. 222-229, text 230-242; G. J. Reinink, 'Ps.-Methodius: A concept of history in response to the rise of Islam', in: A. Cameron and L.I. Conrad, (eds.) *The Byzantine and early Islamic near east: Problems in the literary sources material (Papers in the first workshop on late antiquity and early Islam. no.1, 1 (Princeton 1992). pp 149-187; idem, 'Ismael, der Wildesel in der Wüste. Zur Typologie der Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius', BZ 75 (1982) pp. 336-344.*

<sup>132</sup> - Pseudo-Methodios, *Apocalypse*, introduction of S. Brock, p. 222.



theologians. Firstly, Pseudo-Methodios has a full list of titles showing for the Muslims. He calls them "the wild ass of the desert"<sup>134</sup> "barbarian tyrants who are not men, but children of desolation",<sup>135</sup> "they are a furnace of testing for all Christians"<sup>136</sup> He, like his contemporaries, Sophronios of Jerusalem, and the Armenian historian Sebeos, tries to find interpretation in the Bible for the events of the seventh century.

The first polemical issue in the text concerns divine support for the right religion. This issue, although it appeared in Islamic polemic later in the Abbasid period, was presumably already under discussion between the Muslims and the Christians. Both of them were sure of God's support for their own religion, simply because it was the right one. In this respect Ps.-Methodios says "... Children of Ishmael: it was not because God loves them that he allowed them to enter the kingdom of the Christians, but because of the wickedness and sin which is performed at the hands of the Christians".<sup>137</sup> Here the author was trying to analyse the Islamic victory and refute the Muslims' claims of divine support.

Ps.-Methodios was the first Christian apologist who accused the Muslims of sexual passions, although his text, in which he does not mention the name of the Muslims, is completely ambiguous and confused in this respect,. He accused the Muslims of homosexuality, and says that "for this reason God will hand them over".<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> - Pseudo-Methodios, *Apocalypse*, p.238.

<sup>134</sup> -Pseudo-Methodios, *Apocalypse*, p. 230.

<sup>135</sup> -Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, p. 234

<sup>136</sup> - Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, p. 234.

<sup>137</sup> -Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, p. 231.

<sup>138</sup> -Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, p. 232.

In this text, Ps.-Methodios summarised the whole nature of the encounter between the Muslims and the Christians until his time, the last decades of the seventh century.<sup>139</sup> Among the most interesting points in the text is Ps.-Methodios reports the conversion of many Christians to Islam:

Many people who were members of the church will deny the true faith of the Christians, along with the holy cross and the awesome mysteries: without being subject to any compulsion, or lashings or blows, they will deny Christ, putting themselves on a par with the unbelievers.<sup>140</sup>

In the end, the

" King of the Greeks shall go out against them (i.e. the Muslims), in great wrath; he will be awakened against them like 'a man who has shaken off his wine'. He will go forth against them from the sea of the Kushites, and will cast desolation and destruction on the wilderness of Yathrib<sup>141</sup>.

It is a Christian revival, but this time from the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. This reflects the hope of the writer in association between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians, under one command, against the Muslims.<sup>142</sup>

To sum up, the seventh century saw the first contact between Byzantium and the Muslims, as well as between Islam and Christianity. The seventh century in the east Mediterranean, in the sphere of religion, was a period of incubation for Byzantine-Muslim polemic, which took its systematic form later in the next century.

### **The eighth century**

By the end of the seventh century both sides, the Byzantines and the Muslims come closer in their understanding of each other. The moving of the

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<sup>139</sup>- S. Brock, 'Syriac sources for seventh-century history', *BMGS* 2 (1976) p. 34.

<sup>140</sup> - Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, p. 235.

<sup>141</sup> - Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, p. 237.

<sup>142</sup> - G. J. Reinink, 'Ps.-Methodius: A concept of history', pp. 167-178.

Muslim capital to Damascus in the age of the Umayyads moved the Muslim court with its entire cultural circle to Syria, nearer to their constant enemy. Furthermore, the new powerful Muslim administration was forced to adopt the old Greek systems, and henceforth used the local Christians in their new administration.

The vivid and varied cultural milieu, albeit still mainly Arabic,<sup>143</sup> had created a chance to make close contact between the two religions and the two states. One can assume that there was surely daily contact between the local Muslims and Christians, as the Arabic language moved to become the lingua franca in Syria and Egypt. On the same level, the prisoners on war of both sides would be an essential source for information and cross-knowledge.

Obviously, the eighth century brought to the fore more accurate writings and a closer approach to Islam from Byzantine writers. The pioneers of the Byzantine polemic at this early time came mainly from the Arabic lands, whom could be called safely Byzantine Arabs.

Those Chalcedonian Arabs had played an intermediary role between Muslims and Byzantium. They were fluent in both Greek and Arabic, which make them eligible to be heard by both sides. John of Damascus and his disciple, Theodore Abū Qurrah were the best examples of these Chalcedonian Arabs. Both lived in Arabic lands, and under Muslim government, while still well acquainted with the Greek culture and language. Furthermore the Greek-Arabic milieu of Saint

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<sup>143</sup> - The Arabic sources narrate that the Umayyad caliphs used to send their sons into the desert to live with Bedouins so that they could be acquainted with the pure Arabic language. Al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-khulafā'* (History of the caliphs) p. 245; Ibn 'Idharaī, the historian of Muslim Spain, called the Umayyads caliphate (an overall Arabic state), Ibn 'Idharaī, *al-byān al-mughrib*, (Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne) I, p. 51.

Saba Monastery<sup>144</sup> near Jerusalem played a vital role as a stepping-stone for Byzantium into its former lands in the East.

### John of Damascus

Although the works of John of Damascus on Islam have been almost exhaustively studied in recent decades, in my opinion, some points are still open to question. His main work on Islam, Chapter 100/101 is in my view clearly a later interpolation, written by a certain Greek Monk in Saint Saba Monastery near Jerusalem, and attributed later to John of Damascus.

Several notes on the whole text require discussion. First, as D. Sahas realises, the writer of the text has quoted incorrectly from the Old Testament.<sup>145</sup> Such a mistake is hardly expected from some one such as John of Damascus, the defender of Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the writer of the text of chapter 100/101 shows clearly his fatal lack of knowledge of the Arabic language, which has also been misunderstood by the modern scholars in their comments on the text.<sup>146</sup> He says:

These, then were idolaters and they venerated the morning star and Aphrodite, whom notably they called *Habar* (Χαβαρ) in their own

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<sup>144</sup> -A famous monastery near Jerusalem, founded by St. Sabas in 483. The monastery became an intellectual centre with its great scriptorium, and attracted some prominent names such as John of Damascus. ODB, s.v. 'Great lavra of Sabas', On the cultural milieu around the monastery and its relations with Constantinople, see M. F. Auzépy, 'De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIIIe-IXe siècles) Étienne le sabaïte et Jean Damascène', *TM* 12 (1994) pp. 183-218; S. Griffith, 'The monks of Palestine and the growth of Christian literature in Arabic', *MW* 78 (1978) 1-28; R. P. Blake, 'La littérature grecque en Palestine au VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Le Muséon* 78 (1965) 367-380.

<sup>145</sup> -In first lines of the chapter (*De Haeresibus*, col. 764), the writer of the text (whether John of Damascus or not) explains the epithet Saracens "They also called them Saracens, allegedly for having been sent away (i.e. Hagar) by Sarah empty, for Hagar said to the angel, Sarah has sent me away empty". As D. Sahas pointed out, there no such dialogue in the Bible, and the real story in the Old Testament (Gen. 21) did not contain these words. D Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 133, n. 1

<sup>146</sup> - For instance, R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, p. 106, where he was obviously puzzled; Sahas, D. *John of Damascus on Islam*, p. 84-87.

language, which means great; therefore until the time of Heraclius, there were, undoubtedly, idolaters.<sup>147</sup>

Later in the same text he continues, attacking the Muslim practice of venerating the black stone in Mecca:

“ This, then which they call ‘stone’ is the head of Aphrodite, whom they used to venerate and whom they call Haber Χαβερ”<sup>148</sup>.

While western scholars have tried in vain to trace, or even invent an explanation which goes back to the pre-Islamic period, I would hypothesise that the writer of the text, whether John of Damascus or not, seemed to be confused between some Arabic words.

- 1- Hajar الحجر which means stone and is usually connected with the black stone in the ka‘aba in Mecca, which Muslims venerate<sup>149</sup>.
- 2- Akbar أكبر a superlative of Kabīr which means most great.
- 3- Allah Akbar الله أكبر that means God is very great, and it is a favourite Islamic call, especially in time of war.
- 4- Hobal هبل the greatest idol for the pre Islamic Arabs was in Mecca, inside the Meccan shrine.<sup>150</sup>

Such simple mistakes in Arabic language call for a considerable doubt about the authenticity of this work, and give support to the possibility that it is a later

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<sup>147</sup> - John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus*, 764 B (trans. Sahas, p. 133).

<sup>148</sup> - John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus*, 769 B (trans. Sahas, p. 137.)

<sup>149</sup> -It is a small piece of black stone, wrapped (now) in a frame of silver in its traditional place, the corner of the ka‘ba. According to some Muslim traditions, this stone was dropped from Heaven and it was white, but later it blackened because of the man’s sins. A long time before the appearance of Islam, the pagan Arabic tribes used to venerate this stone. Obviously the stone still has the same veneration in Islam, yet without any clear role in Islamic doctrine or practice. See Ibn Ḥanbal: *Musnad*, 3: 277; Abū al-Walīd al-Azraqī, *Akḥbār Mecca*, extracts with French translations. *Études Arabes dossiers*, Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistico 78 (Rome 1990-1991) p. 23. See also U. Rubin, ‘The ka‘ba: aspects of its ritual functions and positions in pre-Islamic times’, *JSAI* 8 (1986) pp. 97-137. In pages 118-122 he discusses the different Muslim narratives on the origins of the Black Stone.

interpolation. At another point in the text, the writer uses an ambiguous word *Χαβαθν*,<sup>151</sup> which does not make any sense, either in Arabic or in Greek.

This confusion between the Black Stone of Mecca, the head of Aphrodite, and the Islamic words *Allah Akbar*, is a feature of the Byzantine polemic. It had occurred before John of Damascus,<sup>152</sup> significantly in Byzantium where it had been created, and appeared again in Byzantine historical and polemical works after him, by other Byzantine writers, such as Constantine Porphyrogenitus, George Hmaratolos, and Anna Comnena,<sup>153</sup> While it was never used - as far as I know - in any text written by Christian Arabs, such as Ḥanīn b. Ishāq, Qisṭa b. Lūqā, and Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī,<sup>154</sup> who were eloquent in Arabic.

Furthermore, Eutychius, Sa‘īd b. Baṭrīq (877-940 / 263- 328) the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, wrote two extremely important notes concerning John of Damascus. First, he says:

“In the tenth year of caliphate of al-Mu‘tamid (870-902) ‘Iillyā b. Manṣūr, who helped the Muslims in their capturing of Damascus (sic.)

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<sup>150</sup> - Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, 1, pp. 51, 54.

<sup>151</sup> - John of Damascus, *De Haeresibus*, 769 A (English trans. Sahas, p. 137.)

<sup>152</sup> -The first Christian writer who uses these words is Germanus Patriarch of Constantinople (715-730), who in one of his letters says “it will be quite enough for their shame and confusion to allege against them their invocation which even to this day they make in the wilderness to a lifeless stone, namely which is called Chobar”, Germanus, *Ep. ad Thomam episcopum Claudiopoleos*, PG 98, 168A-D; English translation, Mendham, 230-232; see also, R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, p. 106.

<sup>153</sup> -Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De adminstrando imperio*, p. 79; George Hamartolos, (ed. C. De Boor) p. 706; Anna Comnena, *Aléxiad*, ed. B. Leib, II: 10, p. 208, English trans. E.R.A. Sewter, pp. 310-311.

<sup>154</sup> -Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, a Christian Arab theologian, born in 893, lived in Iraq, and died in 973-4. Yaḥyā was well known and well respected in Muslim circles. Ibn al-Nadīm says about him “he was the president of his colleagues (i.e. the philosophers of *Kalām*) and he was matchless in his time *Awḥad Dahrih* .. he told me that he has written in his own hands two of al-Ṭabrī’s tafsīr ( explanations of the Qur’ān)”. However Yaḥyā was a prolific Arabic thinker; from his list of works, one can find a few devoted to anti-Muslim polemic. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 264. On the life and works of Yaḥyā, see the introduction of his book by S. K. Samir, Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *Maqālah fi al-tawḥīd* (Le traité de l’unité de Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī) ed. S. K. Samir, Pontificio Instituto Orientale, (Rome-Beirut 1980) introduction, pp. 25-36.

and had been cursed in the entire world, became the Patriarch of Jerusalem for 29 years”.<sup>155</sup>

Later in the same book he says:

“In the tenth year of al-Wāthiq (842-847) Jirjis b. Manṣūr, who helped the Muslims in their capturing of Damascus (sic.), and had been cursed in all the world, had become the Patriarch of Jerusalem for 16 years”.<sup>156</sup>

These two texts are obviously mistaken, but they reflect the real knowledge and heritage of John of Damascus among the Christian Arabs, surprisingly his fellow Melkites. One may wonder, what was the heritage of John of Damascus among the Melkite Christian Arabs? Were they really fully acquainted his writings? Did they ever read an Arabic copy of a translation of his chapter 101 against Islam? The simple and striking answer seems to be not at all, for we see that the Melkite patriarch, not a member of the laity, was fully ignorant of the personality of John of Damascus.

The other question to be asked is how limited was the Arabic language of Saint John of Damascus, a third generation son of a Christian family, after the Muslim conquests in the seventh century? The scattered allusions in some sources suggest strongly that he spoke, or at least, studied Arabic as well as Greek in his childhood.<sup>157</sup> A fortiori, his being a member, or rather distinguished member of the financial administration of the Muslim State, and having a close daily contact with the caliphs and court, would support this hypothesis.

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<sup>155</sup> - Eutychius, Sa'īd b. Bātrīq, *Kitāb al-tārīkh*, II, p. 69.

<sup>156</sup> - Eutychius, Sa'īd b. Bātrīq, *Kitāb al-tārīkh*, II, p. 61.

<sup>157</sup> - See the full discussion of, J. Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas*, pp. 57-71; D. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, pp.37-41.

My conclusion is that work, chapter 100/101 seems not to have been written by John of Damascus himself or at best it is an altered late copy which was duplicated from a missing original. This text, chapter 100/101, is certainly a product of Byzantine, Greek mentality and language and reflects Byzantine view.

### Theodore Abū Qurrah

The works of John of Damascus were followed by his disciple Theodore Abū Qurrah, who is an ambiguous Melkite Christian Arab writer, born between 740-750 and died circa 820- 825. He composed several works on different theological issues. Presumably, his works were written in Arabic, inasmuch as he did not know Greek,<sup>158</sup> while some of them were translated into the Georgian language. My main concern here is the clear fact that his works against Islam were written or preserved only in Greek.<sup>159</sup> He may have been afraid of any hostile reaction from the Muslim authorities upon writing such a work in Arabic lands. There is no, Arabic origin of these Greek works, which may strain the credibility of their authenticity.

Some of works attributed to Abū-Qurrah seemed to be a later interpolation or altered by a later copyist. One Arabic dialogue attributed to Abū-Qurrah needs a close examination. The text itself says:

“Abū Qurrah said: from your book, where it says in Surat al-Nisa’ ‘(they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him.. But God raised him to himself’ And it also says ‘ O ‘Isa son of Mary, I am causing you to die and raising you to myself, and purifying you from all those who disbelieved in you. And I shall make those who followed you to be above those who disbelieved in you. And you are Judge of the worlds”

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<sup>158</sup> -Convincingly S. Griffith pointed out that Abū-Qurrah did not know Greek, S. Griffith, ‘Eutychius of Alexandria on the emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: a tenth century moment of Christian apology in Arabic’, *B* 52 (1982) p. 163, note 31.

<sup>159</sup>-Abū-Qurrah’s works concerning Islam include some short treatises; some of them discuss general theological issues, while only three were directed against Islam and aimed to refute the prophecy of Muhammad and Islam. C.f. Abū Qurra, *Contra Haereticos, Judaeos et Saracenos varia opuscula*, PG 97, cols. 1461-1596, ed. with parallel German translation R. Glei, *Opuscula Islamica* (Altenberge 1993).



A group of those present at session said, “By God you are right Abū Qurrah! By God you have put our colleague to shame!”<sup>160</sup>

First, the quotation is not from Surat al-Nisā’ (the chapter of women), but from al-‘Imrān (3:55) as Swanson, the original translator, is aware.<sup>161</sup> Yet the quotation is not an exact Qur’ānic text<sup>162</sup> and furthermore it was modified to serve the Christian point of view, and make Jesus *Judge of the worlds*. One may wonder how could those present who were supposed to be elite Muslim scholars, accept such a wrong quotation from the Qur’ān and even cheer Abū Qurrah for his victory!

The polemical works written in Greek and attributed to Abū Qurrah consist of some opuscula. They are mostly very short treatises and pose the inevitable question, what was their original language, since Abū Qurrah himself did not know Greek? Furthermore, as I. Dick pointed out, the word Βάρβαρος attached to the Muslim interlocutor labels the writer of the text as a non-Arab writer,<sup>163</sup> presumably a certain Greek monk in St. Saba Monastery. Dick declares precisely that these texts were not written in the form we have them by Abū Qurrah; they are mostly a collection from his papers, collected and published some time later by his disciples.<sup>164</sup> However, they could be summarised as follows:

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<sup>160</sup> - Swanson, M. N. ‘The cross of Christ in the earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies’, in S. K Samir and J. S. Nielsen, (eds.) *Christian Arabic apologetics during the Abbasid period* (Leiden 1994), p. 133.

<sup>161</sup> - Swanson, ‘The Cross-of Christ in the earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies’, p. 133.

<sup>162</sup> - The verses are “Behold! Allah said: “O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.” 3: 55.

<sup>163</sup> - Abū Qurrah, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq*, introduction of I. Dick, p. 82

<sup>164</sup> - Abū Qurrah, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq*, introduction of I. Dick, p. 82

Opusculum 3: A dialogue with a certain emir of Ḥimṣ on the existence of God.

Remarkably, the writer, whether Abū Qurrah or not, chose a Greek title for the emir, calling him “ τὸν τοῦ δρόου Ἐμέσης”.<sup>165</sup>

Opusculum 21: A dialogue with a Muslim on the spreading of Christianity by poor disciples as a miracle of its rightness.<sup>166</sup>

Opusculum 8: A debate with an Arab man on the trinity.<sup>167</sup>

Opusculum 16: A debate with an atheist on how could God could be everywhere and inside the womb of a woman (Mary).<sup>168</sup>

Opusculum 9: A Dialogue with a Muslim on the death of Christ; was it against his will?<sup>169</sup>

Opusculum 32: A short debate with a certain Muslim on the nature of Christ after his death.<sup>170</sup>

Opusculum 17: A short debate with an infidel on the necessity of baptism and the fate of those Saints who lived before Christ and were not baptised.<sup>171</sup>

Opusculum 22:<sup>172</sup> A debate with a certain Muslim on the Eucharist. This text was copied, or used verbatim in another dialogue between Samonas bishop of Gaza and a certain Muslim.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> - PG 97, cols. 1491-1503, German trans. Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, ed. and trans. R. Gleis and A. Khoury, pp. 128-145.

<sup>166</sup> - PG 97, cols. 1547-1552, ed with a German trans. Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 103-107.

<sup>167</sup> - PG 97, cols. 1527-1529, ed with a German trans: Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>168</sup> - PG 97, cols. 1539-1541, ed with a German trans: Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum* , pp. 148-149.

<sup>169</sup> -PG 97, col. 1629, ed with a German trans Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 150-151. A slightly different Arabic text reserved in Saint Catharine's monastery in Mount Sinai, was published recently with an English translation by S. Griffith, 'Some unpublished Arabic sayings Attributed to Theodore Abu Qurrah', *Le Muséon*, 92 (1979) pp. 29-35.

<sup>170</sup> - PG 97, cols. 1583-1584, ed with a German translations: Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 124-127.

Opusculum 34: A dialogue with a Muslim on polygamy.<sup>174</sup>

Opusculum 35: debate with a barbarian on the free will and God's creation of human actions.<sup>175</sup>

Opusculum 18 (Migne puts it among the works of John of Damascus),<sup>176</sup> on a comparison between Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad in the light of the miracles which support their tasks.

Opusculum 19: A debate with a certain Muslim who urged him to embrace Islam<sup>177</sup>.

Opusculum 20: another response to the previous Muslim dialogue, which is a direct and fierce attack against Muḥammad and sura 112 ('Iḫlās) on the unity of God. The text, in my opinion, is far from being a *real* dialogue with any Muslim in the realm of Islam.

In sum, most of these texts attributed to Abū Qurrah were collected and translated into Greek, some time later, which raises some doubt about their authenticity. Furthermore, in the Opusculum 20, the Greek words “ὁ θεὸς σφυρόπηκτος” reflect the traditional Byzantine misunderstanding of the Arabic word *al-Ṣamad*, and at the same time make more doubtful on the attribution of this text to Abū Qurrah, who was fluent in Arabic.

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<sup>171</sup> - PG 97, cols. 1541-1543, ed with a German trans: Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 124-127.

<sup>172</sup> - PG 97, cols. 1551-1553, ed with a German trans: Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>173</sup> -On this issue, see I. Dick, 'Samonas de Gaza ou sulaiman al Gazzī', *POC* 29 (1980) pp. 175-178.

<sup>174</sup> - PG 97, col. 1555-1557.

<sup>175</sup> -PG 97, cols. 1587-1591, ed with a German translation: Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 88-93.

<sup>176</sup>-PG 94, cols. 1595-1598, ed. with a German translation: Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 124-127.

<sup>177</sup>-PG 97, cols. 1543-1545, ed. with a German translation: Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 94-95.

It is noteworthy that, in all texts, the Muslim interlocutor was portrayed as simple-minded and far from any real competence or equality with the Christian one. Nothing is said about him or his personality. In these texts the traditional Muslim arguments against Christianity are not given. One would hypothesise that these texts were not real dialogues with Muslims, or at best, completely distorted versions of the actual ones.

It is worth noting, however, that, one of his Arabic works is a book about the existence of God and what is the right religion,<sup>178</sup> in which he gives only some hints against Islamic notion of Jihad.

### Leo III and 'Umar II

No other text of the Byzantine-Muslim polemic enjoyed such wide attention as this, and a large number of copies of it are scattered over the world.<sup>179</sup> It is an alleged correspondence between two permanent figures in Byzantium and the caliphate, 'Umar II b. 'Abd al-Azīz (99-101 A.H./ 717-720 A.D.) and Leo III (717-741). The biography of 'Umar II<sup>180</sup> does mention some correspondences between 'Umar and Leo but only concerning the condition of a Muslim prisoner<sup>181</sup> and on

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<sup>178</sup> - Abū Qurrah, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq wa al-dīn al-qawīm*.

<sup>179</sup> - Ghevond, *Histoire*, pp. 40-97; A. Jeffery, 'Ghevond's text: The letters of 'Umar to Leo' *HTR*, 37, (1944) pp. 277-332; Anonymous, 'Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d'époque 'Abbaside contre les chrétiens, ed. and trans. D Sourdel, p. 29; partial English trans. M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & clashes: Islam and Christianity*, pp. 40-53; D. Cardalliac, *La polémique anti-Chrétienne du manuscrit aljamiado*, the translation: II, 194-267; J. M. Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar: 'Umar's letter re-discovered' *Islamochristiana*, 10 (1984) pp. 109-157; see also, S. Gero, *Byzantine iconoclasm*, pp. 153-172; S. Griffith, 'Eutychius of Alexandria on the emperor Theophilus', pp. 159-160, and especially note 20, in which he summarised all the available views of the authenticity of the letter, but without comment.

<sup>180</sup> - Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Sirat 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz*, ed. A 'Abīd, (Cairo 1927.)

<sup>181</sup> - Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Sirat 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz*, p. 175.

another occasion, the emperor sent a doctor to help heal the caliph when he was allegedly poisoned.<sup>182</sup> Muḥammad b. al-Mubarrad<sup>183</sup> in his linguistic book *al-Kāmil* confirmed such messages between the two men. He narrates that the caliph sent two men; one of them seems to be non-Muslim.<sup>184</sup> The Muslim ambassador told the emperor;

“The caliph invites you to Islam. If you accept you will be guided, but I think your destiny had been judged by misfortune unless God changes it another way. So you may accept or write a reply to our message”.<sup>185</sup>

Agapius, the Arab Christian historian, narrates that, the caliph sent a polemical letter to Emperor Leo, in which he refuted Christianity, and the emperor’s reply confuted his letter, using evidences from the holy books, rational arguments, and excerpts from the Qur’ān.<sup>186</sup> Theophanes confirmed the correspondence between the caliph and the emperor.<sup>187</sup>

The correspondence is confirmed by different narratives in both Muslim and Christian sources; the texts of the letters are largely in dispute and modern scholars differ on the authenticity of these texts. Most modern scholars tend to assume that they are later interpolations. Beck argues that the text belongs to the ninth century.<sup>188</sup> The same argument is presented by S. Gero with close attentions to the

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<sup>182</sup> - Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Sirat ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, p. 118.

<sup>183</sup> - Al-Mubarrad, Muḥammad b. Yāzīd an Arabic grammarian, died 898 A.D./ 285 A.H. He composed various works mostly in the grammar of the Arabic language. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 59.

<sup>184</sup> - The narrative portrays this man (‘Abd al-Allah b. ‘Abd al-‘Alā) as Zindīq (heretic), who speaks Greek; presumably this is the only reason which forced the pious caliph to send such a man. It is noteworthy that the emperor told him after a religious debate, “ I know you believe neither in my religion nor in the religion of your sender, i. e. the caliph”. Al-Mubarrad, *al-kāmil*, pp. 294-295.

<sup>185</sup> - Al-Mubarrad, *al-kāmil*, p. 295.

<sup>186</sup> - Agapius, *Kitāb al-‘Unwān*, PO, 8, fasc. 2, p. 503.

<sup>187</sup> - Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, p. 399<sup>25-26</sup> (trans. C. Mango and R. Scott) p. 550.

<sup>188</sup> - H.G Beck, *Kirche und Theologisches Literatur*, p. 338.

chronological allusions in the texts.<sup>189</sup> Jeffery concluded that Leo's letter was written "in the latter half of the IX century or even the beginning of X<sup>th</sup> Century."<sup>190</sup> M. Gaudeul agrees with the same hypothesis, saying, "None of the writings (he means all the different copies of the letters) studied here can really have written by them. They were composed later, and fictitiously ascribed to Leo or 'Umar. This was a current practice at this time".<sup>191</sup> Furthermore he dismissed the Latin version of the Leo's letter as a "draft of an essay in apologetics" rather than a personal letter.<sup>192</sup> Recently Hoyland reviewed most of these opinions, and accepted the attribution of the letters to the late eighth or early ninth century.<sup>193</sup>

In conclusion, I would assume that there was letters were indeed exchanged between the emperor and the caliph, inasmuch as different contemporary sources confirm this. Obviously, the texts which we have now of these letters seem to be a later interpolation, which harmonise with Muslim-Christian polemic in the tenth or eleventh century. In the following chapters, there will be a theological analysis of these controversial texts within the context of Byzantine-Muslim polemic.

### **Hārūn al-Rashīd and Constantine VI**

The other polemical correspondence between Byzantium and the Muslim world is the letter of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd to the Emperor Constantine VI. This verbose letter reflects another stage of the development of Muslim attitudes and understanding of Christianity.

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<sup>189</sup> - S. Gero, *Byzantine iconoclasm during the reign of Leo III*, p. 131.

<sup>190</sup> - A. Jeffery, 'Ghevond's text: The letter of 'Umar to Leo', p. 276.

<sup>191</sup> - J. M. Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar', p. 114.

<sup>192</sup> - J. M. Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar', p. 116.

<sup>193</sup> - R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 490-501.

Firstly there is no reason to be sceptical about the authenticity of this letter. The few chronological allusions are mostly accurate and the whole letter is coherent inasmuch as there is no internal contradiction.

A full study of such a text would be out of the space here and requires a monograph on its own, I will permit myself to examine the theological framework of the letter. The first and clearest notice in the letter is the large number of quotations from the Qur'ān; we have hundreds of quotations from the Muslim sacred book in comparison with sixteen citations from the Bible, mostly accurate.

The main thrust of the Muslim apology is to defend the prophethood of Muḥammad; this takes 41 out of a total of 67 pages. The Muslim polemic is directed against the Trinity and nature of Christ, while the traditional late Muslim objections against the icons, cross, relics and role of Christian councils does not appear in this early text. Furthermore there is no single word against the authenticity of the Bible, neither the New Testament nor the Old. Remarkably, he interprets the word *tahrīf* تحريف (alteration of texts) as evidence of Christian *mala fide* in their elucidation of their books to keep secret the prophecy of Muḥammad.<sup>194</sup>

To sum up, the first two centuries of Byzantine-Muslim relations witness the slow growth of a rigid polemic. The Byzantine writings on Islam and Muslim religious life and motives are hazy to a degree. One can assume that before the ninth century there was no Byzantine polemic written in Byzantine lands and showing an explicit understanding of Islam. Most of the early polemical texts seem *prima facie*

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<sup>194</sup> -Ibn Abi al-Laith, *Letter du calife Hârûn al-Rašîd*, p. 44 (the Arabic text), p. 66 (French translation)

to be altered or even invented by a later copier and then attributed to well known theologians.

It is worth stating that the Monastery of Saint Saba near Jerusalem and its Greek-Arabic cultural milieu was the earliest cultural bridge between Byzantium and Muslims. Among its monks, we know of John of Damascus and his disciple Theodore Abū Qurrah; several others worked as translators between Arabic and Greek. Others travelled between Byzantium and Muslim lands.<sup>195</sup>

As for the Muslim writings, it seems that the first two Muslim centuries did not see remarkable Muslim polemical writings. Yet the daily dialogues between Muslim and Christians were extremely likely to have been a part of daily life in the newly conquered areas in Egypt and Syria, but unfortunately we do not have any early texts, even though some may have existed.

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<sup>195</sup> -E.g. Michael the Synkellos, see M. Cunningham, *The life of Michael the Synkellos* (Belfast 1991); also the alleged trip of the Saint Theodore of Edessa, see A. Vasiliev, 'The life of Saint Theodore'.



## Chapter Two

### Religious Themes in Byzantine-Muslim Relations

Byzantine-Muslim relations were characterised by various features, including military, religious and economic ones. These features fluctuated from situations of bitter conflict to scant periods of peaceful contact between the two antagonists. While the military and political relations have received considerable attention from the modern historians, fewer efforts have been dedicated to the religious and social phases of these relations. My aim here, then, is to examine these complex relations from their standpoint.

#### Border zones and daily contact

The main and most direct zone of contact between Byzantium and the Arab world were the borders in northern Syria and Mesopotamia. These border areas have received substantial attention recently from the modern scholars; several studies have emerged which shed considerable light on the whole issue.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, most of these works pay more attention to the annual raids and defence system on both sides

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<sup>1</sup> - On the borderlands see J. Haldon and H. Kennedy, 'The Arab-Byzantine frontier in the eighth and ninth centuries: military organisation and society in the borderlands', *ZRV* (1980) pp. 79-116; Oikonomides, 'Organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux Xe-XIe siècles et le Taktikon de l'Escorial' *Acts du XIVe Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines I* (Bucarest 1974) pp. 285-302, reprinted in idem, *Documents et études sur les institutions de Byzance (VIIe-Xve s.) Variorum* (London 1976) No. XXIV; H. Ahrweiler, 'L'Asie Mineure et les invasions arabes (VIIe-IXe)', *Revue Historique*, 227: 1 (1962) pp. 1-31, reprinted in idem *Etudes sur les structures administratives et sociales de Byzance*, Variorum (London 1971); I. Ševčenko, 'Constantinople viewed from the Eastern provinces in the middle Byzantine period', in *Eucharisterion: Essays presented to Omeljan Pritask*, HUK 3 / 4 (Cambridge 1979-1980) pp. 712-47; reprinted in idem *Ideology, letters and culture in the Byzantine world* (London 1982); C. E. Bosworth, 'The Byzantine defence system in Asia Minor and the first Arabic incursions', *Proceedings of the second symposium on the history of Bilād al-Shām during the early Islamic period up to 40A.H./A.D. 640*, ed. M. A. Bakhit (Amman 1978) pp. 116-124, reprinted in idem, *The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran*, (Variorum 1996) no. X; idem 'Byzantium and the Syrian frontier in the early 'Abbasid period', *Bilād al-Shām during the early Abbasid period (132 H. / A.D 1059)*. *Proceedings of the fifth international conference on the history of Bilād al-Shām*, ed. M. A Bakhit (Amman 1991) pp. 54-62, reprinted in idem, *The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran*, no. XII .

of the borders, whereas only a few works examine the peaceful contact which existed between the populations over the borders, especially in the religious area.

The borderline between Byzantium and Muslims was flexible and changeable. It witnessed severe fighting and changes of power on both sides. While the contemporary sources are relatively full of the details of fighting and military campaigns, one hardly finds the same rich and vivid narratives concerning the peaceful contacts between the civilian populations on both sides.

Byzantine emperors began, as early as the reign of Heraclius, to depopulate the borderlands and create a no-man's land, as a new defence strategy against the successive Muslim raids.<sup>2</sup> This policy evidently created a virtual wall between the civilian populations on both sides, which was strengthened by the difficult terrain of the Taurus Mountains. Prima facie, the human contact over the borders seems virtually non-existent, but this judgement is not tenable.

In their paper on the Byzantine Muslim borders, J. Haldon and H. Kennedy convincingly elucidate the different natures of both sides of the frontier. As they point out, the Byzantine area was mainly rural, while the Muslim area was civilian, full of rich and big cities.<sup>3</sup> Presumably, this contrast led to an active trade, and ipso facto helped, more or less, to create some forms of cultural contiguity and contact between the populations of the two areas, regardless of the religious antagonism between Byzantines and Muslims. An inevitable question, however, immediately imposes itself: how could this peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Byzantines coincide with the spirit of Muslim Jihad and the annual raids of Muslims into Byzantine lands?

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<sup>2</sup> - On this policy c.f. J.Haldon, and H. Kennedy, 'The Arab-Byzantine frontier', p. 83; C. E. Bosworth, 'The Byzantine defence system in Asia Minor', p. 119; idem, 'Byzantium and the Syrian frontier in the early Abbasid period', pp. 46-57.

Fragmentary evidence from both sources provides a few glimpses from which to build an image, though a hazy one, of the peaceful communications between Muslim and Christian peoples over the borders. The first explicit indication is to be found in a Byzantine military text. In the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos (ca. 950- 1011) the author complains bitterly about the peaceful and tolerant mixed life between the Byzantine border populations and their Muslim neighbours:

"The Saracens who are hard pressed in their fortress say these things to our people dwelling along the frontiers, and our people of low station and high, in their love of gain, furnish them not only with great quantities of grain and flocks but also with all number and manner of foodstuffs in their possession".<sup>4</sup>

Then he suggests special arrangements to prevent this case of co-operation between Muslims and Christians on both sides of the borders:

"For this reason, there must be great vigilance and security, as well as much intimidation and severe penalties, to cut these activities off and prevent them".<sup>5</sup>

This Byzantine text supports the hypothesis of Haldon and Kennedy, of the different natures of both sides of the borders, that is the rural character on the Byzantine side and the urban character of the Muslim borders, which led to some kind of de facto trade exchange, at least at a limited local level.

On the Muslim side, we have some geographical treatises which deal with the border areas between Byzantines and Muslims. These give explicit details about the economic growth of borderlands and the flourishing trade in this area. Ibn Ḥawqal, the tenth century geographer, speaks of the cities of the al-‘Awāṣim and their khans

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<sup>3</sup> - J.F. Haldon, and H. Kennedy, 'The Arab-Byzantine frontier in the eighth and ninth centuries', pp. 79-116.

<sup>4</sup> - Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, pp. 155- 156.

<sup>5</sup> - Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, p. 157.

and prosperous markets.<sup>6</sup> He describes in detail the wealth of the border cities. He mentions Qinsirīn and its flourishing markets; like other Arab writers, he sharply criticises Sayf al-Dawla for his maltreatment of the merchants and his heavy taxes.<sup>7</sup> Similarly Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī reports that al-Maṣīṣah was a trade centre for furs, which were exported all over the Muslim world.<sup>8</sup> Al-Muqaddasī speaks of this area as one of the main two sources of slaves (mainly eunuchs) in Islamic lands, which was completely terminated after the devastation of the Thughūr by Byzantium (in the tenth century).<sup>9</sup> Remarkably, the reputation of the wealthy families of Ṭarsūs was significant even years after the devastation of the city by the Byzantine armies.<sup>10</sup>

Von Sivers, notwithstanding some exaggerations and generalisations, carefully examines the conflict between the trade with Byzantium and the war against it.<sup>11</sup> He hypothesises that the interest in trade (over the borders) attracted more attention than the annual raids. He adds that in terms of profit, the trade proved to be more worthwhile.<sup>12</sup> One can say that Von Sivers ignores any part played by Jihad, and the Muslim volunteers who, as al-Ṭarsūsī said, were the original founders of the Thughūr system.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, he pays special attention to the ruling classes, their ethnic origins and their commercial interests in the Thughūr, but as regards the trade itself, he pays no attention to the other partner in it, i.e. the Byzantines. In sum, it

<sup>6</sup> - Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Surat al-'Ard*, pp. 176-179.

<sup>7</sup> - Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Surat al-'Ard*, pp. 176-178, 180.

<sup>8</sup> - Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, 4, p. 557.

<sup>9</sup> - Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, p. 242; English trans, *The best divisions for the knowledge of the regions*, p. 216 (French trans. p. 56)

<sup>10</sup> -When the Byzantine armies stormed Ṭarsūs, most of its population had been either forced to live under the Byzantine rule, or had fled with their families and what they could carry to other Muslim lands. Some of these people were robbed by nomads: Ibn Miskawayh, narrates that one of their caravans lost 20,000 bales of goods, the Qaḍī (judge) of Ṭarsūs had 120,000 Dinar in this caravan. These figures, even if we accept some exaggeration, undoubtedly indicate their wealth, Ibn Miskawayh, II, 215.

<sup>11</sup> -P. Von Sivers, 'Taxes and trade in the 'Abbāsīd Thughūr, 750-962/ 133-351', *JESHO* 25: 1(1982) pp. 72-99.

<sup>12</sup> - P. Von Sivers, 'Taxes and trade in the 'Abbāsīd Thughūr', p. 73. In Contradiction Von Sivers cites (p. 78) a narrative of al-Ṭabarī, that the caliph al-M'mūn refused a Byzantine offer of a land-trade connection and privileges.

seems safe to assume that, on the basis of our sources, both conditions (war and trade) existed simultaneously.

As for the trade over the borders, there are only some allusions to the existence of overland trade. In addition to the description in the Byzantine military text on the local trade mentioned above, we have some other hints from the sources. In the truce of Şafar, which was concluded in 969 –970 AD /359 H. between the Hamdanid emir Qarghūyā and Byzantium, there is a list of the merchandise exchanged between Byzantium and the Muslims, such as gold, silver and cattle.<sup>14</sup> Later, in 1016 A.D./ 406 A.H., the emperor Basil II forbade all kinds of trade between Byzantine lands and Muslims. Nevertheless, Şālih b. Merdās, a local Muslim emir (1024-1029 A.D./ 415-420 A.H.), was very keen to exempt his tiny emirate from this sanction.<sup>15</sup>

It is noteworthy that Muslim sources state or imply that some Greeks and Armenians were allowed to enter the Muslim border cities for work.<sup>16</sup> Al-Ṭarsūsī, an eyewitness and settler in Ṭarsūs until its surrender to the Byzantine armies (16 August 965 /15 Sh'abān 354), mentions that special subsidies out of taxes in Ṭarsūs were given to Greek and Armenian guides in return for their services in Thughūr. Remarkably, he calls them “al-mu'allafah qulūbuhm المولفة قلوبهم”, that is to say, those whose hearts are reconciled.<sup>17</sup> This unique expression which appears in the Qur'ān,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> - Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr*, p. 457.

<sup>14</sup> - Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, ed. L. Cheikho, p. 214; for more discussion on the situation in Syria at the end of eleventh century see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp. 200-204; T. Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide (359-468- 969-1076) essai d'interprétation de chroniques arabes médiévales*, 2 vols. (Damascus 1986-1989) tome I, passim.

<sup>16</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 198. He narrates that some of the Armenians and Greeks (soldiers?) disguised themselves as workers and tried to enter the city of Malatya (Melitene) on the pretext of work but were soon been discovered and most of them were killed. Although they met a deadly fate, the narrative implies that Byzantine workers were generally allowed to enter the Muslim cities at this time.

<sup>17</sup> - Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr*, p.450. English translations: C. E. Bosworth, 'Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān al-Ṭarsūsī's *Siyar al-Thughūr* and the last years of the Arab role in Tarsus (Fourth/Tenth century)',

has a special religious importance, it indicates that there is some hope of attracting these non-Muslims to Islam, or, which is less important, to make use of their services for payment.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, this expression from a Ṭarsiān writer reflects the tolerant treatment of these neighbours, and in the light of the context of the Qur'ānic verse, one may presume that efforts were made to convert these people to Islam.

In substance, the different natures of the borders encouraged, as seen above, the populations of both sides to venture a cautious and presumably limited co-operation. These peaceful relations were to be found in small-scale of trading, and in the employment of Greek artisans who moved over the border to work for Muslims. Obviously, the Byzantine authorities did not welcome such close relations.

There were also some social contacts across the border, as indicated by the scant allusions in the sources which suggest that some heroes were well known on both sides.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, with such a long lasting war, there were certainly several divided families over the borders,<sup>21</sup> but our sources are extremely scanty on such matter. We know, however, that the Byzantine hero Digenes Akretas and the famous eunuch Samonas were descended from such divided families. Across the borders between caliphate and Byzantium, large numbers of people, armies, ambassadors, renegades, apostates crossed from this side or that, as well as displaced tribes; finally

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*Greco-Arabia* 5 (1993) 183-195, reprinted in idem, *The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran*, no. XV, p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> -“Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to the truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom” 9: 60.

<sup>19</sup> - Ibn Qudamah, *al-Mughnī fī fiqh al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, (Beirut 1985) 6, p. 328.

<sup>20</sup> -Al-Ṭarsūsī narrates that a certain Muslim caught a Byzantine knight who identified himself as a well-known figure whom the Muslims would be expected to know and respect. Similarly al-Mas'ūdī narrates that a Byzantine man who converted to Islam told him that the Byzantines made portrayals of ten Muslim heroes (he counted among them the leader of the Paulicians) and put these photos in some of their churches. Among these Muslims there were 'Umar emir of Militene and 'Alī the Armenian, prominent Muslim leaders in Jihad against Byzantium. Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-thughūr* p. 41; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, IV, p. 198.

<sup>21</sup> - See the lengthy story of al-Tanūkhī about an aged Byzantine prisoner of war who recognised his Muslim grandson among the Muslim army. Al-Tanūkhī, pp. 92-93.

we can add to these escaped slaves.<sup>22</sup> Undoubtedly all these people carried with them their human experiences and cultural and religious background, as well as news and rumours, which built a human bridge between the two rivals, Byzantines and Muslims.

Another part of the Byzantine-Muslim frontier, the island of Sicily, was divided between Muslims and Byzantines.<sup>23</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal bitterly criticised the Muslim population of the island. He says a group of them dwelled with the Christians and used to marry Christian girls, and surprisingly, if one of these girls gives birth to a boy he becomes Muslim but if she has a girl she is brought up as a Christian.<sup>24</sup> This is not acceptable in Muslim law.

### Jihad and the holy war

Yet another attempt to elucidate the notion of holy war between Muslims and Christians does not seem a new endeavour, since some valuable studies had recently examined and evaluated this issue.<sup>25</sup> However, one wonders whether we can divorce theory from practice, the idea of holy war from the war itself. The question of the

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<sup>22</sup> - We have only scanty narratives on the escaped slaves. In the truce of Şafar, which concluded in 969–970 AD /359 H. between the Ḥamdanids emir Qarghūyā and Byzantium; Ibn al-‘Ādīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, pp. 95-99. English trans. W. Farag, *The truce of Şafar A.H. 359 December-January 969-970*, (Birmingham 1977). Another example was Byzantine slave women, who married (or more likely were forced to marry) Muslim men, but deserted their husbands, took away their children and rejoined their previous Byzantine families. See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-Buldān*, III, p. 357.

<sup>23</sup> - Sicily was divided between Muslims and Christians at this time. Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb surat al-‘Arḍ*, p. 203.

<sup>24</sup> - Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb surat al-‘arḍ*, p. 129.

<sup>25</sup> -There are huge number of works on Jihad, see M. Canard, ‘la guerre sainte dans le monde Islamique et dans le monde chrétien’ *Revue Africaine* (1936) pp. 605-623, reprinted in idem *Byzance et les musulmans du proche orient*, no. VIII; M. Watt, ‘Islamic conceptions of the holy war’ in T. P. Murphy (ed.) *The holy war* (Ohio State University Press 1976) who links the Islamic expedition and the pre-Islamic traditions of raids or Razzias between the Arab tribes. Watt’s theory finds support from Donner. See M. Donner, ‘The sources of Islamic conceptions of war’ in J. Kelsay, and J. Johnson, (eds.) *Just war and Jihad: Historical and theoretical perspectives on war and peace in western and Islamic traditions* (London 1991) pp. 31-69; A. Sachedina, ‘The development of Jihad in Islamic revelation and history’ in J. Johnson and J. Kelsay, (eds.) *Cross, crescent and sword: the justification of war in western and Islamic tradition* (New York 1990) pp. 35-50; D. Cook, ‘Muslim apocalyptic and Jihad’ *JSAI* 26 (1996) pp. 66-104.

applications and implications of holy war, or more accurately, of religion on the wars waged between the Byzantines and the Muslims, will be the starting point here.

Jihad in Islamic doctrine is one of the essential pillars of belief; it is a holy duty for every believer to be willing to sacrifice his soul and body for the sake of Allah. Through many verses, the Qur'ān urges the Muslims to fight the enemies of God till they convert or pay the (Jizya) poll tax.<sup>26</sup> One of the Ḥadiths attributed to the prophet Muḥammad says:

“I have been ordered to fight the (whole people), till they declare that, no God but Allah, and Muḥammad is God's messenger. If they do so and pray in the direction of our Qiblah (the direction of praying), and eat from our slaughtered (animals), their blood and money will be forbidden, and they will be equal to Muslims in their duties and rights”.<sup>27</sup>

Jihad was one of the essential motivations for the Muslims in their wars against Byzantium. The annual or seasonal raids were theoretically an act of Jihad and it was a duty of the Muslim rulers to maintain the sequence of raids. Evidently there were several other motives behind these raids than Jihad or holy war. Some of these motives were political and economic or simply looking for booty to be obtained from the rich Byzantine lands.<sup>28</sup>

The previous conclusion on Jihad in Islam is paradoxical and yet somehow does not reflect the whole complex issue. Islamic Jihad was not a movement to destroy or

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<sup>26</sup> - “Then fight in Allah's cause - thou art held responsible only for thyself - and rouse the Believers. It may be that Allah will restrain the fury of the unbelievers; for Allah is the strongest in might and in punishment” 4:84; “Allah hath purchased of the Believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): they fight in His Cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur'ān and who is more faithful to his Covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme” 9:111.

<sup>27</sup> -Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, III, 199.

<sup>28</sup> -In the account of the first large-scale Muslim conquests against Byzantium al-Balādhurī says the caliph Abū Bakr called people “ for a holy war and arousing their desire in it and in the obtainable booty from the Greeks”. While Watt presumes that the primary aim of the Muslim expeditions



kill others, or to offer them the choice between the sword and conversion.<sup>29</sup> The essential aim was not destruction. Furthermore any Muslim ruler should (at least theoretically) firstly invite those enemies to embrace Islam or pay a poll tax before waging war against them. The main aim for Jihad in theory was the spread of Islam.<sup>30</sup> Yet the material gains were essential motives as Watt points out.<sup>31</sup>

### Jihad propaganda against Rum

One of the essential phases of the Muslim Jihad against Byzantium was the anti-Byzantine public propaganda, which provoked anti-Byzantine feeling amongst Muslims and substantially helped to muster more volunteers for the war. In the Umayyads and first 'Abbasid caliphates, the state efforts in Jihad were fundamental and the regular armies undertook the effort besides numbers of volunteers who fought for the sake of God and for booty from the Byzantine lands in addition. The eclipse of the central power from the second half of the ninth century brought a wider role for independent or quasi-independent rulers as well as individuals who took a greater or lesser part in the war against Byzantium.

Broadly speaking, in the Byzantine-Muslim warfare considered as a whole there was always a significant role for al-Muṭaw'ah (the volunteers). The main impulse or motive behind the volunteering of these masses was religious zeal, but the allurements

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against Syria and Egypt was to collect booty. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 115, English trans. P. Hitti, p. 165; M. Watt, 'Islamic conceptions of the holy war', p. 147.

<sup>29</sup> - M. W. Watt, 'Islamic conceptions of the holy war', p. 147; J. Haldon, *Warfare, state and society in the Byzantine world 265-1204*, (London 1999) p. 296, note. 10.

<sup>30</sup> - Abū Yūsuf, Ya'qūb, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, (The book of the taxes) pp. 227-228. The Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd, in his letter to the emperor Constantine VI, was stunned by the refusal of the emperor to pay the Jizya, and save his subjects from the Arab raids. He urges him to pay such amount of money, which the caliph does not need, neither regard as great money, even he used to give away similar amounts or bigger in one audience. The caliph demands this money only for sake of God, and wishes to save those Byzantines by paying this Jizya. The caliph claims to have mercy over those poor Byzantine farmers who exposed to Muslim raids, and promise them if they every came under his authorities, by wealth of life and freedom of religion. And argue the emperor to save these people by paying this money, which would bot be a shameful act. Ibn Abi al-Laith, *Letter du calife Hārūn al-Rašid*, p. 66 (the Arabic text) pp. 82-83 (French translation).

of plundering the Byzantine lands should not be ignored. Lay Muslims were normally full of zeal against the Byzantines and easy to provoke against them. In such cases the mosques played a crucial role in provoking these people to take part in Jihad, or supporting those who were under enemy pressure on the borders.

Byzantine contemporary sources were obviously aware of this fact. As Nikephoros Ouranos states:

“For the enemy (i.e. the Muslims), oppressed by the lack of provisions, send to the inner regions of Syria and to the towns and communities, and proclaim to the faithful in mosques the calamities which have befallen them and the pain of starvation oppressing them. They tell them such things as “Should our fortress fall into the hands of Byzantium, it will be the ruin of all lands of the Saracens”, whereupon the Saracens rise to the defence of their brethren and their faith, and spread the word in the surrounding regions and all about”.<sup>32</sup>

On the Muslim side al-Ṭabarī narrates that, following the killing of two prominent Muslim emirs, ‘Alī the Armenian and ‘Umar emir of Melitene in 863,<sup>33</sup> several wealthy Muslims hastened to contribute money and to prepare an entire expedition against Byzantine lands without any instigation or control from the authorities in Baghdad.<sup>34</sup>

However the Muslim sources speak explicitly of the efforts of Muslim leaders to recruit more volunteers for Jihad. Undoubtedly, the Muslim regular armies were accompanied by other unpaid volunteers, who felt that they were doing their

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<sup>31</sup> - M. W. Watt, ‘Islamic conceptions of the holy war’, p. 148.

<sup>32</sup> - Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, p. 155.

<sup>33</sup> -On the defeat and killing of ‘Umar see G. Huxley, ‘The emperor Michael III and the battle of Bishop’s Meadow (A.D. 863)’ *GRBS*, 16: 4 (1975) pp. 443-450.

<sup>34</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā’rīkh*, III: 3, p. 1511.

”ثم أخرج أهل اليسار من أهل بغداد و سامرا أموالا كثيرة من أموالهم ففقوا من خف للنهوض إلى الثغور لحرب الروم بذلك وأقبلت العامة من نواحي الجبل وفارس والأهواز وغيرها لغزو الروم فلم يبلغنا أنه كان للسلطان فيما كان من الروم من ذلك تغيير ولا توجبه جيش إليهم لحربهم“

religious duties or by the propaganda of Muslim clerics, and, remarkably, in the most cases by the Muslim caliphs.<sup>35</sup>

### Political importance of the Jihad

Among the terms set by the Muslim legislators for a legitimate caliph or Imam is “to fight those who resist the supremacy of Islam after being invited to embrace it, until they convert or sign a treaty of subjection”.<sup>36</sup> As Kennedy points out, the Jihad against Byzantium was considered vital to the political prestige of the Muslim rulers, as well as to their individual piety and concern for the cause of Islam.<sup>37</sup> For instance, the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd wore a special cap adorned with two words *حاج / غازي* (fighter for the faith, pilgrim),<sup>38</sup> while the Fatimid caliph al-Mu‘izz, in his dialogue with a Byzantine ambassador, emphasised the obligation of the Muslim rulers to maintain the spirit of Jihad.<sup>39</sup> In Byzantium the war against Muslims was certainly a fruitful way to improve the prestige of the emperors, especially the usurpers who were not of the imperial blood.<sup>40</sup>

### The Caliphates and Daylamite Būyids

While the first ‘Abbasid caliphs were generally enthusiastic for jihad and able to impose their will to adapt and maintain a policy of supporting it, enjoyed the upper

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<sup>35</sup> - See for example the letter of the caliph al-Muntaṣir ordering his governors to provoke people to volunteer in Jihad and to join the regular army. Al-Ṭabarī, III: 3, p. 1485.

<sup>36</sup> - Al-Māwardī, *The ordinances of government*, English trans. W. Wahba, p. 16; Ibn Khaldūn, *al-muqdimah*, p. 219.

<sup>37</sup> - J. Haldon and H. Kennedy, ‘The Arab Byzantine frontier’, p. 106.

<sup>38</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 2, p. 709. Remarkably a certain poet praised him saying: Whoever wishes to see you; you will be either in the Ḥaramayn (sacred mosques in Mecca and Medina) or in Thughūr. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 2, p. 710.

<sup>39</sup> - S. M. Stern, ‘An embassy of the Byzantine emperor to the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu‘izz’ *B* (1950) reprinted in idem, *History and Culture in the medieval Muslim world* (London 1984) No. IX, p. 251; see also A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, pp. 371, 420- 425.

hand in the internal affairs of their caliphate and firmly maintained their obligation to support Jihad, the late caliphs, over-shadowed and impotent as they were, were not keen on Jihad and even powerless to support it.

Al-Ṭabarī narrates that the caliph al-Muntaṣir, ordered the powerful general Waṣīf al-Khādim to fight Byzantine aggression (867AD./ 248 H.) and to announce the Jihad. Regardless of the eloquent letter sent by the caliph to his governors announcing his decision to mount a Jihad, it emerged that his ulterior motive in all this was simply to get rid of a powerful Turkish page, as a result of the denunciation of a vizier.<sup>41</sup>

As for the Daylamite Būyids, the de facto rulers in Baghdad, in the works of contemporary writers such as Ibn Miskawayh and Abū Shujā ‘ al-Rudhrāwī, not a single word can be found betraying their enthusiasm or any degree of support for Jihad. Their shortsighted policy focused mainly on the complex local events in Iraq, and as Persians their attentions mostly were directed to the east rather than to the struggle against Byzantium. But even if Ibn Miskawayh, however, did not like or dare to criticise his benefactors, the Persian family, other Muslim sources could express their regret that such wealthy emirs did not support Jihad.<sup>42</sup> Obviously, this Persian family had its own different orientations. However, the eastern part of Islamic world (mainly Khurasān) proved to be the main source of volunteers in the Muslim-Byzantine wars.

As for the Fatimids, the idea of Jihad was used as part of their political propaganda against the ‘Abbasids. They devoted their strong propaganda machine to justifying their territorial expansions in Egypt and later in Syria, under the pretext of

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<sup>40</sup> -A. Kolia-Dermizaki, 'Ο βυζαντινός "ιερός πόλεμος" 'Η έννοια και ή προβολή του θρησκευτικού πολέμου στο βυζάντιο (*The Byzantine "Holy war" The idea and Propagation of religious war in Byzantium*) Historical Monographs, no. 10 (Athens 1991) p. 221.

<sup>41</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'rikh*, III: 3, p. 1480.

supporting the Jihad. More important for them was to appear as the rightful Muslim caliphs, who could protect the Muslims. The caliph al-Mu'izz announced that he was going on a Ḥajj (pilgrimage) and then mounting a Jihad against Byzantium,<sup>43</sup> but he did not fulfil any of these aims and this seems to have been part of the Fatimid propaganda.

### The independent rulers

The ninth and tenth centuries witnessed several independent or quasi-independent rulers who controlled parts of the Muslim world. For most of these rulers, certain common areas were set as a key targets for their political and religious prestige. The first and most important was the Muslim holy places in Mecca and Medina. The second area was al-Thughūr on the Byzantine-Muslim frontiers. There are several factors, which apparently prompted any Muslim emir to extend his authority over this border area. The first factor was his personal piety and prestige in connection with Jihad. The second was the wealth of the border area and the activity of its trade.

Once Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn, the governor of Egypt (868-883 / 254-270), held the government of Egypt in his grasp, he began to extend his power to the border areas. The Arabic sources state clearly the personal attitude of Ibn Ṭulūn in assessing his motives to control the Thughūr.<sup>44</sup> Von Sivers goes further in his assumption that the Thughūr as the major market and outlet to Byzantium was his main aim in fighting other rivals for the control of this area.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> - Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr* p. 440. He reports a narrative of a certain Muslim who was living in Baghdad and saw the parade of horses of one Būyids emir (Aḥmad) and he wondered sorrowfully how no single horse of this number (12,000) was devoted for Jihad.

<sup>43</sup> - Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, 1, p. 231.

<sup>44</sup> - Ibn al-Aṭhīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, pp. 14-15

<sup>45</sup> - Von Sivers, 'Taxes and trade in the 'Abbāsīd Thughūr', p. 92.

In a highly spiritual and emotional situation, the emir Sayf al-Dawla collected amounts of dust off his clothes after each raid against Byzantium, and ordered it to be put under his cheeks in his tomb.<sup>46</sup> This is not surprising, as he was keen to patronise the writers, poets, and clerics who praise his victories and song of his battles.

### **Al-Thughūr and the ribaṭs: Muslim Jihad on the borders.**

Muslim Thughūr were on the first line of the military engagements between Byzantine armies and Muslims. Remarkably, these border castles and cities took on a religious character similar to the Latin religious orders in Syria and Spain in the Crusades. The Muslim sources say that the system of Thughūr was created not by the state but by the volunteers who dedicated their lives for Jihad. The first castle on the borders was Ḥisn Thabit b. Naṣr, which was erected by a number of pious people at the end of the Umayyads to beginning of the ‘Abbasid eras.<sup>47</sup> Eventually, these castles near the borders were established and occupied only by men who were living like knights and monks.<sup>48</sup>

Ibn Ḥawqal paid special attention to the city of Tarsus, as the main city of Thughūr. His narrative is extremely important, and reveals several facts. He says:

“Every big city from Sigistān, Qirmān, Faris, Khuzistān, al-Raī, Isbahān, all the Mountains, Ṭabristān, al-Jizīrah, Iraq, Ḥijaz, Yemen, Shamāt, Egypt, and Morocco, has a Dār (house) for its people. The volunteers from each city stay in its house. And the donations, the huge loads, as well as what the sultans and the wealthy paid and sent voluntarily, all arrive at this place. They vie with each other to pay. There was no prominent man anywhere who has not a waqf (endowment) of country estate, which has

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<sup>46</sup> -Ibn Tagharī Bardī, 3, p. 18; Remarkably the vizier al-Manṣūr b. Abī ‘Āmar in al-Andalus ordered the same desire to be carried out after his death. Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-‘Islām*, p. 292.

<sup>47</sup> - Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr*, p. 457.

<sup>48</sup> - Al-Ṭarsūsī, mentions a Ḥiṣn (castle) which had never seen a woman or young boy during the whole period of Muslim control. Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr*, p. 459.

fields, farmers and crops, or house or khan; Dūr, and baths; or even sharing of other things”.<sup>49</sup>

The same fact was confirmed by a contemporary Ṭarsyān writer, who says:

“The city’s street and alleys (sikak) at number 2,000 and its houses 34,000. Of these last, it was estimated that two-thirds of them were for ‘uzāb (single men) coming from all over the Islamic world. All the known Muslim cities have a house or tow in Ṭarsūs. And the remaining one-third for the city’s permanent population, these latter houses being either privately owned or endowed as waqf for charitable purposes”.<sup>50</sup>

Obviously from these narratives, especially al-Ṭarsūsī, it is clear that donating money and special waqfs as a continuous charity, was common practice among wealthy Muslims, including some wives or concubines of the caliphs.<sup>51</sup> Surprisingly, there were some fraudulent Muslims who, taking advantage of the keen religious spirit among Muslims claimed to be victims or supporters of Jihad in order to collect some money from others.<sup>52</sup>

### **Muslims clerics and the Jihad against Byzantium**

From the early Muslim conquests onwards, the Muslim historians were keen to list the names of the prophet’s companions who took part in every campaign. Later, in the Byzantine-Muslim wars, Muslim clerics played an indisputable role. Their inflammatory speeches surely stimulated the soldiers to fight for their religion.

One of the earliest and most obvious examples of these clerics is Asād b. al-Furāt, the Qāḍī (judge), who led the campaign against Sicily in 827 /212 H. as an emir

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<sup>49</sup> - Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb surat al-’arḍ*, p. 184.

<sup>50</sup> - Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr*, p. 452. English trans. (Bosworth omits one sentence of the previous quotation) C. E. Bosworth, ‘Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān al-Ṭarsūsī’s *Siyar al-Thughūr*’, p. 190.

<sup>51</sup> - C. E. Bosworth, ‘Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān al-Ṭarsūsī’, p. 191.

<sup>52</sup> - Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥādarah*, p. 166; Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghḍādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād*, 8, pp. 122-123; see C. E. Bosworth, ‘Byzantium and the Arabs: war and peace’, pp. 12-13.

and Judge.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī played a significant role in Jihad and religious propaganda against Byzantium in the second half of the tenth century. According to the narrative of Ibn Miskawayh, who was an eyewitness, al-Qaffāl volunteered to go on Jihad and travelled to Syria with a large number of Mujāhidīn (combatants for the faith) from Khurasān.<sup>54</sup> Remarkably, a late Muslim writer called him “the leader of Muslims”.<sup>55</sup> The Khurasanis stayed in Iraq and tried to overthrow the Daylamite Būyids. They accused the latter of inertia, and asked for large sums of money to support Jihad against Byzantium. However, the whole situation led to a civil war between the new zealous elements and the local army of Daylamite Būyids.<sup>56</sup> A large number of them were killed, while the rest of the Khurasanites were scattered everywhere, and some of them (including al-Qaffāl) departed towards the Ḥamdānids in Aleppo.

From the narratives of the Arabic writers, one can draw the role of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī in all these events. Before leaving his country, he was involved in the propaganda and recruitment of some of these men for Jihad. He soon travelled to the border area and his men helped Sayf al-Dawlah in his struggle against Byzantium. The main effort of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī was his famous polemical poem, which was in response to another polemic poem sent by the emperor Nikephoros Phokas.<sup>57</sup>

Ibn Nabātah al-Sa’dī (d. 983 / 374h.) was another example of the religious men who took part in the Muslim Jihad against Byzantium. He was living in the border area. Ibn Nabātah was an eloquent orator; the Arabic of his speeches was splendid, although they were full of rhymed prose. Ibn al-Azraq, narrated, “he (i.e. Ibn

<sup>53</sup> -Ibn ‘Idharay, *al-bayān al-mughrib*, I, p. 95; on his life see M. Canard, ‘Vie d’Asd, conquérant de la Sicile. Extraits du Riyād al-Nufūs’ in A Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes I* (Bruxelles 1935) pp. 340-342, reprinted in idem, *L’expansion arabo-islamique et ses répercussions* (London 1974) n. II.

<sup>54</sup> - Ibn Miskawayh, *Kitāb tajārib al-umam*, 6, p. 223.

<sup>55</sup> - Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi’īyya*, 2, p. 179.

<sup>56</sup> - Ibn Miskawayh, *Kitāb tajārib al-umam*, 6, pp. 222-231.



Nabātah) used to write the Khuṭbah (sermon), and once he had ascend the rostrum of the Mosque and delivered it, most of the men in the mosque went directly to the Jihad".<sup>58</sup>

This Islamic phenomenon, viz. of clerics taking part in the war, did not occur only on Syria's frontiers but was found almost everywhere in the Muslim lands. In 976 AD./365 H. a Muslim raid was dispatched from Sicily against south Italy with " a group of pious and religious men".<sup>59</sup>

In the accounts of the battles, there is no clear information about any military activity on their part, but in a few cases there are some hints of the part they played in strengthening the morale of the Muslim soldiers.<sup>60</sup> Yet the other groups, presumably younger ones, stayed (Rabaṭ<sup>61</sup>) in the border areas, between Byzantines and Muslims, took part in raids or merely delivered speeches and sermons. The Muslim sources mention several names, among them Aḥmad b. 'Ubayd Allah, Abū al-'Abbās (d. 975/364), whom they called the settler in Thughr of Ṭarsūs.<sup>62</sup> Around that date another Ṣufī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammed b. 'Ismā'īl al-Ṣūfī went out to Ṭarsūs for Jihad.<sup>63</sup> We have more names of those clerics and Sufis who devoted themselves and volunteered for Jihad against Byzantium.<sup>64</sup> A distinguished figure called 'Abd Allah b. Muḥammad b. Ḥamdawayh, (d. 948AD./ 337H) took part in Jihad 22 times (ghazwah).<sup>65</sup> Some

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<sup>57</sup> - On these poems see infra, Chapters 4 pp. 250-251; 5, pp. 297-299.

<sup>58</sup> - Ibn al-Azraq, cited by M. Canard, *Sayf Al Daula, Recueil de texts relatifs à l'émir Sayf al Daula*, p.285.

<sup>59</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, pp. 87-79.

<sup>60</sup> - Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> -Ribāṭ رباط and verb رابط (3rd. person sing. Past simple)- comes from ribaṭ al-Khayl, which is a number of 5 horses or more dedicated to God, as mentioned in the Qur'ān: 8: 60. There are several Ḥadīthes attributed to the prophet in which he praises the horses and the ribāṭ. Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, kitāb al-Jihād, passim; see C. E Bosworth, 'Byzantium and Arabs: war and peace', p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> - Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 317.

<sup>63</sup> - Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād*, 5, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> -Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād*, 6, pp. 55, 68,171,280,332; 8, p. 484; 11, p. 108, 153, 235, 12, p. 327, 406; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, p. 229.

<sup>65</sup> - Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 3, p. 297.

well-known scholars settled in Tarsus and attracted several students from all over the Muslim world, who presumably took part in Jihad as well.<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, Yāqūt al-Ḥamāwī listed several Muslim clerics who settled in the Thughūr cities, and some of them stayed to devote themselves for Jihad.<sup>67</sup> Some others, such as 'Ismā'īl b. Nujīd (d. 976/ 365H.)<sup>68</sup> collected contributions from their disciples or others to send to those who were fighting on the border.

Some wealthy clerics in different parts of the Islamic world were stunned and provoked by the Byzantine advances against northern Syria, and being unable to fight, they entrusted some other poor volunteers with the task and paid all their travel costs to Ṭarsūs.<sup>69</sup> One can assume that the practical contribution made by these Sufis and clerics, who were mostly old men when they stayed in the border area, was merely theoretical, for they could not offer much military support. What is more important is the fact that their reputation and the disciples who travelled to them would spread any call for help throughout the Muslim world, which would certainly, as the Byzantine sources realised,<sup>70</sup> provoke people to travel to take part in the war, or send contributions, or to arm someone to fight in their place.

Obviously, the Muslim clerics in Ṭarsūs lived as knight-monks, similar to the military organisations in Syria in the crusades of 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Unlike the Crusaders or other Spanish military organisations, it seems that the bond which united the Muslim volunteers in Ṭarsūs was what is known in Islamic civilisation as al-'aṣabiyyah, (clan bonds), or being disciples of the same Shaykh, (cleric).

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<sup>66</sup> - Among them, Abū al-Ḥarith al-Fayd al-Ṭarsūsī, (d. 909). See Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-talab*, I, pp. 192-193; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 4, pp. 70-71.

<sup>67</sup> - Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, 1, p. 170; 4, p. 557.

<sup>68</sup> - Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 336.

<sup>69</sup> - Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād*, 8, pp. 74, 122-13, 12, p. 327; Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 520 (372H.) This is an old tradition in Islamic history as the Muslim sources tell of several rich Muslim women who gave money for the Jihad. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Maḥāsīn wa al-aḍāḍ*, p. 77; al-Ḥamadānī, *Takmilat tarīkh al-Ṭabarī*, p. 72.

<sup>70</sup> - Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, p. 155.

In the city of Ṭarsūs the process of summoning the warriors to arms was a job of al-Muḥtasib,<sup>71</sup> whose job was religious in the first place.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, the same writer describes some groups of young men, or rather boys, who gathered under the command of a Shaykh (cleric); he led them until they reached manhood and joined the regular army.<sup>73</sup> In the last days of the city under the successive Byzantine attacks, the envoys of the city who were dispatched to the Muslim rulers were some clerics,<sup>74</sup> who played a crucial, yet unsuccessful role in the history of Muslim Jihad.

Those Muslim clerics played yet another role in the Jihad against Byzantium, yet again a vague and fruitless one. In a few cases, it appears that some Muslim rulers had forgotten their duties in the Jihad. Those clerics tried to remind them of their moral obligation to help other Muslims, who were suffering in the Byzantine raids. In 972 A.D/ 361 A.H., a delegation from the Muslim elite clerics in Baghdad met the Daylamite Būyids Bakhtiār to urge him to support the Muslims in Syria against the advance of the Byzantine armies.<sup>75</sup> However, their efforts proved to be fruitless.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup> -Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr*, p. 453. English trans. C. E. Bosworth, 'Abū 'Umar 'Uthmān al-Ṭarsūsī', pp. 191-192.

<sup>72</sup> -Al-Muḥtasib, a unique Islamic public post similar in some way to the modern city councillor, who had a wide range of competencies. His main duty was to control all aspects of the city's markets, and supervise the public moral standards. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-muqaddimah* (the introduction) p. 225.

<sup>73</sup> -Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr*, p. 454. English trans. C. E. Bosworth, 'Abū 'Umar 'Uthmān al-Ṭarsūsī', pp. 193-194; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, I, p. 189.

<sup>74</sup> -Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr*, p. 455. English trans. C. E. Bosworth, 'Abū 'Umar 'Uthmān al-Ṭarsūsī', pp. 194-195.

<sup>75</sup> -Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, pp. 247-248; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 4, pp. 65 (he listed the members of this delegation, who were the elite of the Baghdad Muslim thinkers) Ibn Taghrī Bardī narrates that the Persian emir called the people to Jihad, a huge number gathered and after a while a large army was dispatched from Baghdad, to fight against Byzantium. They routed the Byzantine army and returned with the heads of the Byzantine murders. This story seems to be fictitious. For other, see Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, pp. 44-45.

<sup>76</sup> -The Persian ruler found this a golden opportunity to force the powerless caliph to contribute to the Jihad. When the latter refused to pay, or rather was not able to do, his property was confiscated and

## **Thughūr in the Hadith**

One of the unique features of Islamic literature was to develop a literature of prophecy, mostly attributed to the prophet or other prominent Muslims, which praised a certain city or region and its people.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, little of this literature is directed against certain areas or cities. The border area, al-Thughūr certainly was no exception. Abū 'Umar 'Uthmān al-Ṭarsūsī, collected several Ḥadiths and narratives concerning the Thughūr, particularly his city Ṭarsūs. These sayings remarkably praise the Thughūr (especially Ṭarsūs) and their populations (even the Greeks!). Furthermore they assure their martyrs the highest ranks in heaven.<sup>78</sup> Among the five Ḥadiths attributed to the prophet I could not find any in the major Muslim authorities on Ḥadith which I examined. In the light of this fact, one can assume that these sayings are certainly later interpolations, intended to provoke Muslims and attract their attention to this area.

## **Jihad and recruitment**

This crucial role of the Muslim clerics in the wars certainly raises the question of the role of religious recruitment during the Byzantine-Muslim conflict. While the Byzantine recruitment system was systematically complex and financially well organised, whether depending on fixed salaries or land,<sup>79</sup> a large part, if not the largest, of the Muslim army consisted of volunteers, who settled in the Thughūr. The

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he was forced to sell his clothes, in utter humiliation to the caliphate. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, pp. 44-45; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 4, pp. 66.

<sup>77</sup> -The best example is Ibn 'Asākr, who devoted half of the first volume of his book (a history of Damascus) to collect and cite all the Hadithes or traditions which praised his city; interestingly, he devoted some pages to defending Damascus and refuting some common traditions against it.

<sup>78</sup> -Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Siyar al-Thughūr*, pp. 441-446, English translation. C. E. Bosworth, 'Abū 'Umar 'Uthmān al-Ṭarsūsī', pp. 187-188.

<sup>79</sup> -On the Byzantine recruitment system, see J. Haldon, 'Recruitment and conscription in the Byzantine army c. 550-950. A study on the origins of the Stratiotika Ktemata', (Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse: Sitzungsberichte, 357. Bd.) (Vienna 1979); also of interest is idem, 'Military service, military lands, and the status of soldiers: Current problems and interpretations', *DOP* 47 (1993) pp. 1-67.

emperor Leo VI realised this fact and wondered how the Byzantine could have used such zeal.<sup>80</sup>

### Khurasani volunteers

The main group of the Muslim volunteers in the tenth century came from Khurāsan. Ibn Miskawayh speaks of two groups of Khurasāni volunteers who came to help the Muslims in Syria. The first group arrived around 964 / 353 H. They were around 5000 men who took part in some of the battles beside Sayf al-Dawla. However, these groups could not change the balance of the struggle and had to leave northern Syria because of a famine.<sup>81</sup>

The main group of Khurasāni volunteers were more than 20,000 men, among them the poet and preacher al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī. They came to Baghdad in 966AD./355H. These men, who were full of religious zeal, did not accept the apathetic attitude of the Daylamite Būyids and their luxurious life. However, a quarrel soon erupted between them and the authorities of Baghdad, who refused to give them any more money. Soon fighting and looting spread in Baghdad, and a number of people in both sides were killed.<sup>82</sup> In the end, the rest of the groups marched to Syria to try to save their fellow Muslims there. In 967 AD./ 357H. they made a desperate and fruitless attack on Byzantine troops near Antioch.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> -Leo VI, *Tactica*, PG 107, col. 972, partial English translation: A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, pp. 382-383; also of interest G. Dagon, 'Byzance et le modèle islamique au Xe siècle, à propos constitutions tactiques des l'empereur Léon VI', *CRAI* (1983) pp. 219-243.

<sup>81</sup> -Ibn Miskawayh, *Kitāb tajārib al-umam*, 6, 201-202; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, III, pp. 335, 339.

<sup>82</sup> -Ibn Miskawayh was an eyewitness of all these events; he was living in Baghdad, working with the Daylamite Būyids. It seems that his life, and maybe the possibility of passing his writings on to this powerful Persian family had his attitude towards these Khurasānite volunteers. One would think that he have had no sympathy at all with them: See Ibn Miskawayh, *Kitāb tajārib al-umam*, 6, pp. 201; Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 23. On the other hand this quarrel was alluded to in the polemical poem of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī against Byzantium and Emperor Nikephoros Phokas. In which he described the Daylamite Būyids as salves. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'īyyah*, 2, p. 183; G. Grünebaum, 'Eine poetische Polemik', p. 52.

<sup>83</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 171.

In sum, religious motives played an essential role in the war against Byzantium, yet the purposes of this war were not always religious. In the name of Jihad some Muslim rulers set their own political propaganda either to promote their dynasty or their personal prestige, or for the sake of their religious belief (the Shiite Fatimids). Jihad was the main motive in recruiting new elements for the continuous warfare against Byzantium. In the name of Jihad, contributions and donations were gathered from all over of the Islamic world. We have several examples from the Muslim sources of some wealthy people all over the Muslim lands who gave generously for Jihad, either to equip some individuals to fight instead of them, or just as a general contribution.<sup>84</sup> The Byzantine sources, particularly the military ones, show a clear awareness of this factor of propaganda and the important of collection of money for the Muslims who fought against Byzantium.<sup>85</sup>

Before and after almost every raid, religious propaganda was an extremely powerful way to recruit new men for the fight, or at least to send contributions to those who were stationed in the advanced outposts facing the enemy. In the battlefields, the influence of the religious orientation was unmistakable; prayers, speeches, or even poetry were used to raise the morale of the soldiers.<sup>86</sup>

### Byzantine holy war

As J. Haldon has recently pointed out the Byzantine attitude towards war is paradoxical and ambiguous.<sup>87</sup> This problem has attracted the attention of modern scholars and valuable work has been done to analyse and elucidate the Byzantine concept of holy war.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> - Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād*, 7, p. 74; 21, p. 407.

<sup>85</sup> - Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>86</sup> - Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb 'Uyūn al-akḥbār*, 1, pp. 123-127.

<sup>87</sup> - J. Haldon, *Warfare, state and society in the Byzantine world*, p. 13.

<sup>88</sup> - For an intensive study of the Byzantine holy war, see A. Kolia-Dermizaki 'Ο βυζαντινός "ἱερός πόλεμος" J. Haldon, *Warfare, state and society in the Byzantine world*, pp. 13-33; V. Laurent,

It is a widely accepted fact that Christianity as a whole did not develop a notion of holy war waged for the sake of God which was similar to that of Islam.<sup>89</sup> In the Byzantine church, this situation is slightly different. Modern scholars are in dispute concerning this issue. While some insist that the Byzantine church over its long history was always inclined towards peace rather than war,<sup>90</sup> others such as Donner, support the view that there was a notion of holy war in Byzantium, but not yet on explicit judgement. Donner goes further to suggest a Byzantine influence on the Muslim notion of Jihad, which does not seem a plausible idea.<sup>91</sup> A third group of scholars,<sup>92</sup> with whom one totally agrees, took a different and more flexible view, which is to distinguish between a theoretical attitude towards the idea of killing and the *de facto* attitude of supporting the emperor and imperial army in their wars. This paradoxical combination led, more or less to Byzantine theologians' justifying the war against the enemies of Christ, and *ipso facto* of the state.

Broadly speaking, in contrast to the entire and overwhelming support from the Latin church to the crusaders in their holy war against the Muslims in the east, or in the west in Spain,<sup>93</sup> the Byzantine church maintained its role as a mainly theoretical and spiritual influence. Obviously, in case of the lengthy war with the Muslims, there are some indications that the church had, somehow, a role in the conflict, albeit

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'L'idée de guerre sainte et la tradition byzantin.' *Revue historique du Sud-Est Européen* 23 (Bucharst, 1946) pp. 71-98; T. M. Kolbaba, 'Fighting for Christianity: Holy war in the Byzantine Empire' *B* 68 (1998) pp. 194-221.

<sup>89</sup> - J. Haldon, *Warfare, state and society in the Byzantine world*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>90</sup> -N. Oikonomides, 'The concept of Holy war and the two tenth- century Byzantine ivories' in T. S. Miller and J. Nesbitt, (eds.) *Peace and war in Byzantium* (The Catholic University of America Press 1995) pp. 62- 86.

<sup>91</sup> - Donner, 'Sources of Islamic conceptions of war', 36-37.

<sup>92</sup> - J. Haldon, *Warfare, state and society in the Byzantine world*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>93</sup> - For more on the Latin church and the notion of the holy war see K. Erdman, *The origin of the idea of crusade*, trans. A. Baldwin et al., (Princeton University Press 1977); S. Kahrl, 'The genesis of the Crusades: the springs of western ideas' in T. P. Murphy (ed.) *The holy war*, pp. 10-32.

theoretical, or mainly spiritual, such as offering blessings and prayers for the Christian Byzantine armies in their war against the Muslims.<sup>94</sup>

In 960 AD./ 349H., when a Byzantine fleet was heading for Crete, there were religious celebrations, prayers in all the churches and the patriarch went to bless the fleet before as it set out.<sup>95</sup> On several other occasions the patriarch attended the ceremonies held after or before the imperial military expeditions.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the emperor Nikephoros Phokas sent letters to the monks in several monasteries, especially to Athos, appealing for their prayers for his armies who were fighting against the Muslims.<sup>97</sup>

In his treatise on the preparations for the imperial military expedition, the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus lists the gifts and donations of horses and mules which were required for the imperial expedition as "complimentary" from the metropolitans and archbishops, as well as from "the pious monasteries".<sup>98</sup> Although, there is no connection in this text, between the donations from the Church and the war with Muslims, it indicates clearly that the church took amore or less practical, though very limited role in supporting the military activities, mainly in the tenth century in the war against the Muslims.

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<sup>94</sup> - Actually the church began early, from the reign of the first Roman Christian emperor (Constantine the Great) to take part in rites of the imperial victory. Henceforth the presence of the Patriarch and the other clerics was essential in most imperial military celebrations. C.F. M. McCormick, *The eternal victory*. p. 54 et seq.

<sup>95</sup> - Schlumberger, *Un empereur Byantin*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>96</sup> - Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three treatises on imperial expeditions*, p. 145.

<sup>97</sup> -J. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*, (Paris 1960) no. 83, 88, pp. 146-147; H. Ahrweiler, 'Un discours inédit de Constantin VII Phyrogénè,' in idem *Études sur les structures administratives et sociales de Byzance*, Variorum (London 1971) no. 10, p. 395, dating the letter to 958; A. E. Laiou, 'The general and the saint: Michael Malinos and Nikephoros Phokas', in *EYΨYXIA Mélanges offerts à Hélène Ahrweiler*, 2 vols. (Paris 1998) II, p. 408

<sup>98</sup> - Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three treatises on imperial military expeditions*, p. 101.



In sum, one may assume that the Byzantine armies did not fight what can be called a holy war for God's sake,<sup>99</sup> similar to those known in the Islamic world or to the Crusades. At the time, the church and the whole Christian religious establishment clearly supported the Byzantine armies in their struggle, and although this role was mainly spiritual and theoretical it was a crucial one. The essence of religion was always present, for example in supporting the soldiers, raising morale, giving some confidence in God's divine support of the empire, chanting hymns at the festivals in the Hippodrome.

It is worth noting that Muslims were aware of the fact that Christianity had no concept of the holy war, and used this fact in their polemic by accusing the Byzantines of deviating from the peaceful spirit of Christianity. Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, in his reply to the emperor Nikephoros Phokas, said that if the latter were a real Christian king he would have some mercy for his enemies, i.e. the Muslims, according to the Christian dogma.<sup>100</sup> Similarly al-Jāhiz alluded to the Byzantine practice of castration and commented sarcastically on the claims of the Christians of showing mercy.<sup>101</sup>

### **Nikephoros II Phokas and the holy war**

Among the Byzantine emperors who fought against Muslims, Nikephoros Phokas bears a special importance. For the first time in Byzantine history, Nikephoros Phokas requested the church to regard the victims of the struggle against the Muslims as martyrs. The patriarch Polyuktos (956-970) refused such an unprecedented

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<sup>99</sup> -This notion has been widely accepted by most modern scholars. See J. Haldon, *Warfare, state and society in the Byzantine world*, p. 23; N. Oikonomides, 'The concept of Holy war and two tenth-century Byzantine ivories' in T. S. Miller, and J. Nesbitt, (eds.) *Peace and war in Byzantium: essays in honor of George T. Dennis* (Washington D.C. 1995) pp. 62-86.

<sup>100</sup> - Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'īyyah al-kubrā*, II, p. 181. G. Grünebaum, 'Eine poetische Polemik', p. 50, verse N. 5.

<sup>101</sup> - Al-Jāhiz, *al-Haywān*, I, p. 80.

request.<sup>102</sup> Undoubtedly, the whole war waged by this emperor was profoundly characterised by its religious dimension. His campaigns against the Muslims aimed, in most cases, to destroy the Muslim mosques, and he turned some of them into stables for his horses, as well as burning any copies of the Qur'ān that might be found.<sup>103</sup>

Remarkably, the Muslim sources acknowledged that his aim was to head for Jerusalem and free it from Muslim rule.<sup>104</sup> Bar Hebraeus also says, "He (i.e. Nikephoros Phokas), was set towards Jerusalem, but he was unable to go there, because the troops accompanying him were exhausted by the great slaughter which they had made, and by the excessive weight of the spoils which they had taken".<sup>105</sup> Nikephoros Phokas in a polemical poem sent to the caliph al-Mu'ī' (946-974/ 334-363) declared his aim not only to free Jerusalem but also to conquer Mecca, the holiest city in Islam, and to establish a Christian kingdom in the heart of Islam. This would come after destroying the caliphate in Baghdad the spiritual leadership of the Muslim world.<sup>106</sup>

### The holy war of John Tzimiskes

Like his predecessor, John Tzimiskes' campaigns against Syria were often characterised by a crusading spirit. Undoubtedly the religious spirit and its effects

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<sup>102</sup>- John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, pp. 274-275; Cedrenus, *Compendium historiarum*, II, 369; Zonars, 506. For a full discussion of this point see Kolia-Dermizakim, *Byzantine holy war*, pp. 136-139; J. Haldon, *Warfare, state and Society in the Byzantine world*, pp. 28-29; M. Canard, 'La guerre sainte dans la monde islamique dans le monde chrétien', pp. 616-619. As Haldon has pointed out recently, the previous disputes between the patriarch and the emperor stand behind the scene. For the legislation of Nikephoros against the possessions of the monasteries see N. Svoronos, *Les nouvelles des empereurs Macédoniens concernant la terre et les strationtes* (Athens 1994) pp. 151-161. G. Ostrogosky, *History of the Byzantine state*, English trans. J. Hussey (New Jersey 1957) pp. 254-255; P. Charanis 'The monastic properties and the state in the Byzantine empire', *DOP* 4 (1948) pp. 53-118, esp. pp. 56-58.

<sup>103</sup> - See *infra*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>104</sup> - Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 84.

<sup>105</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 172.

<sup>106</sup>-Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'īyyah*, 2, p. 180, verses 38,41-42; G. Grünebaum, 'Eine poetische Polemik', p. 49, verses 40-41, 43-44.

were clear in several aspects of his campaigns.<sup>107</sup> Our main source is his letter to the Armenian king Ashot III, which is full of personal self-aggrandisement and exaggeration.<sup>108</sup>

The emperor assured Ashot “many wondrous things God has done” and “ God has aided the Christians at all times”.<sup>109</sup> He was “intent on delivering the Holy Sepulchre of Christ our God from the bondage of the Muslims”.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, he took special care in collecting the Christian relics from Syria,<sup>111</sup> his armies destroyed and mutilated the Muslim mosques, and furthermore his armies captured several hundreds of Muslim children who were presumably forced to convert later.<sup>112</sup>

John Tzimiskes was a charming person, quite different from the monk-like character of Nikephoros Phokas. This in some ways softened his attitude towards Muslims. This is reflected in the Muslim and Armenian sources; we have even a narrative of an alleged love story between him and a certain Ḥamdanid prince.<sup>113</sup> This story is definitely not acceptable in the conservative Islamic society, and it is not backed up by any other narratives in the contemporary sources, but it could be considered as a reflection of his relatively close personal contacts with Arabs.

### Religious symbolism

Three centuries before the rise of Islam, in the reign of the emperor Constantine the Great, the strong link between the cross as a Christian religious

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<sup>107</sup>-For more details on his campaigns in Syria see M. Canard, ‘La date des expéditions mésopotamiennes de Jean Tzimiscès’ no. XIII in idem: *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, ‘U. K. Tawfiq, *Muqaddimāt al-‘idwān al-ṣalībi ‘ala al-sharq al-‘arabi: al-‘Imperātor Yūhanna Tizimiks wa siyāsauth al-sharqiah* (the foreword of the Crusades’s attack against the Arabic East: the emperor John Tzimiskes and his oriental policy) 2ed. ed. (Alexandria 1967) (in Arabic); P. E. Walker, ‘The Crusade of John Tzimiscēs in the light of new Arabic evidence’, *B* 47 (1977) pp. 301-327;

<sup>108</sup>-See his letter to King Ashot of Armenia: Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, pp. 29-33; see the discussion of P. E. Walker, ‘The Crusade of John Tzimiscēs’, esp. pp. 320-321.

<sup>109</sup>-Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, p. 29.

<sup>110</sup>-Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, p. 30.

<sup>111</sup>-Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, p. 32.

<sup>112</sup>-On the Byzantine policy of converting Muslims and Muslim children see *infra* chapter 3, pp. 211-216.

symbol and the Byzantine armies was established. This was signified by the legendary words, '*In hoc signo vinces*'.<sup>114</sup> Whatever its historical authenticity, it established Christian symbolism among the Byzantine armies.

Later, the Byzantine armies as well as society in general began to use not only the cross for spiritual aid in war, but also icons and the religious relics of saints. It is noteworthy that this powerful cult was not limited to the laity but also to the highest minds in Byzantium.<sup>115</sup> The icon of Mary was an essential element in defending Constantinople against the enemies of the empire and God.<sup>116</sup> In several, indeed almost every battle this spiritual aid took a hidden, but crucial role. During the Arab attack against Thessalonika in 904 most of the city's population went to pray and ask help from the city's saint Demetrios.<sup>117</sup> In the vita of Saint Barbarus, or rather the Barbarian saint, the Byzantine fighters raised the cross and the icon of Theotokos in front of Muslims and inflicted a heavy defeat.<sup>118</sup>

Presumably, the Muslim notion of Jihad brought to the fore the increasing importance of this religious symbolism in Byzantium. From crosses to flammatory speeches, each side was trying to raise the spirits of its soldiers, and to supplicate for aid and victory from God or from the saints. The icons and crosses were an essential

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<sup>113</sup> - Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, p. 28.

<sup>114</sup> -Theophanes, *Chronographia*, (trans. C. Mango, and R. Scott) p. 23; c.f. M. McCormick, *Eternal victory*, p. 101.

<sup>115</sup> - See for example the narrative of Photios on the Russian attack against Constantinople in 860, and the decisive role of the "holy robe" of the Virgin carried by the patriarch himself around the walls of the city. C. Mango, *The homilies of Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople*, (Cambridge 1958), pp.82-112, esp. p. 102.

<sup>116</sup> -Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, p. 397<sub>13</sub>, 398<sub>1</sub> (trans. C. Mango and R. Scott) pp. 545-546.

<sup>117</sup> -John Kamanates, *De expugnatione Thessalonicae*, p. 22, German trans., G. Böhlig, pp. 39-40.

<sup>118</sup> -Constantine Acropolites, '*Sermon on St. Barbarus*' *Analekta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, 1, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, St. Petersburg, 1881, reprinted (Brussels1963) p. 409; see, D. Sahas, 'Hagiological texts as historical sources for Arab history and Byzantine-Muslim relations: the case of a "Barbarian Saint" *EB*, new series, 1-2 (1996-1997) pp. 50-59.

Remarkably, this strong Byzantine belief in divine support on the battlefield coincided with a similar conviction in the west, Liduprand of Cremona narrates that visions of saints appeared which scare the Muslims and supported the Christians in south Italy. See Liduprand of Cremona, *The works*, p. 69.

aid to the armies when they fought against the Muslims.<sup>119</sup> Most important was prayer before the fight which the whole army had to take part in,<sup>120</sup> as well as the impressive speeches by the emperors or leaders to urge the soldiers to fight bravely against the enemies of Christ.<sup>121</sup>

Muslims were aware of the spiritual importance of the cross. Muslim historians were keen to count the silver and golden crosses among the spoils of war, and the Byzantine prisoners of war were paraded through the streets in Muslim cities, holding golden and silver crosses.<sup>122</sup> However, Byzantines often regained these crosses back from the Muslims.<sup>123</sup> The frequent capture and recapture of crosses in the war may reflect their importance, which was felt by both sides as a religious and political symbol of Byzantium and Christianity.

Evidently, Byzantines sometimes also used the cross as a political symbol in their relations with Muslims. John Tzimiskes used a cross as a sign of safe conduct to the city of Damascus.<sup>124</sup> In 1030 / 422 H. Ḥasān b. al-Jarāḥ, one of the leaders of the Arab tribes, rebelled against the Fatimīd authorities in Syria, and called for Byzantine military help. Al-Maqrīzī says that he "carried the cross on his head".<sup>125</sup> These two occasions may betray the Byzantine aim of imposing a religious humiliation on the Muslims by forcing them to carry the sign of Christianity. The Byzantine expeditions were characterised by religious and spiritual ceremonies, whether before the

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<sup>119</sup> -In the naval expedition against Crete, the Byzantine army carried a huge cross for their spiritual help. Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, p. 8 (German trans. F. Loretto p.14); Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three treaties on imperial expeditions*, p. 125; On the veneration of the Cross in Byzantium see N Thierry, 'Le culte de la croix dans l'empire byzantin du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle au Xe siècle dans ses rapports avec la guerre contre l'infidèle' *RSBS* 1 (1980) pp. 205- 28.

<sup>120</sup> -Nikephoros Phokas, *Parecepta militaria*, pp. 45, 57, 59; Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, pp. 127, 141.

<sup>121</sup> -See for example the speech of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas during the siege of Chandax, Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, pp. 12-13 (German trans. F. Loretto pp. 18-19).

<sup>122</sup> -Al-Ṭabarī, III, 4, p. 2103; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 55, 109; Ibn Taghri Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 3, p. 175.

<sup>123</sup> -Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, p. 61<sub>2-5</sub> (German trans. F. Loretto p. 61).

<sup>124</sup> -Ibn al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl tārīkh Dimashq*, p. 13.

expedition were due to take place<sup>126</sup> or in those special imperial ceremonies, when the emperor was coming back from the battle.<sup>127</sup>

### Islam in the Byzantine court and diplomacy

Leaving aside the religious antagonism between Byzantium and the Muslims, diplomatic relations between them did not stop, except for short periods during the wars. Evidently each side viewed the other with respect as a supreme power in the Mediterranean world.<sup>128</sup> In *De Ceremoniis*, we have a text describing the place of the Arab delegation at the imperial banquet, “οἱ δὲ ἐξ Ἀγάρων φίλοι τῆ τῶν πατρικίων”,<sup>129</sup> even above the Bulgarians, who are Christians.

Patriarch Nicholas I Mysticos says, “There are two lordships, that of the Saracens and that of the Romans, which stand above all the lordships of the on earth”;<sup>130</sup> furthermore he refers to “your God-given authority”.<sup>131</sup> Another explicit example of the respect for Muslims and their religion appears in a Byzantine letter sent to the Umayyad caliph al-Ḥākim (961-976 / 350-366) (in al-Andalus). This unusually begins with traditional Muslim introductions, that of praise for Muḥammad, though it does not call him a prophet.

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<sup>125</sup> -Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, 2, p. 180. On the political situation in Syria between Byzantines and Fatimids see T. Bianquis, *Damas et le Syrie sous la domination Fatimide*, II, pp. 470-487.

<sup>126</sup> - Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three treatises on imperial military expeditions*, p. 78, 115

<sup>127</sup> - Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three treatises on imperial military expeditions*, pp. 141, 149

<sup>128</sup> - See the discussion of D. Sahas, ‘Byzantium and Islam: an encounter of two theocracies mutual admiration, and exclusion’, lecture at The Greek-Canadian Association of Constantinople, (Toronto 1993)

<sup>129</sup> -Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis* (ed. Bonn) II, p. 740; c.f. J. Bury, *The imperial administrative system*, p. 156.

<sup>130</sup> - Nicholas I, *Letters*, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> - Nicholas I, *Letters*, p. 5.

“In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate. May God bless Muḥammad and his family and give him peace”<sup>132</sup>

### Religion in the terms of the treaties

In the history of Byzantine-Muslim relations in the ninth and tenth centuries, several treaties were drawn up between the two sides. The majority of these treaties *ipso facto* were dedicated mainly to the military and political aspects of the relations, while the few remaining texts need a different and close examination in light of the religious background.

Islamic law (Shari‘ah) draws specific guidelines for Muslim rulers in their dealings with non-Muslim rulers,<sup>133</sup> though in the different political and military conditions some Muslim rulers simply ignored or were forced to ignore the Islamic precepts in dealing with Byzantines.

Unfortunately we have only a few surviving full texts of treaties or letters between Byzantium and the Muslims, to shed light on the religious orientation. One of the most important treaties, the truce of Ṣafar, was a humiliating treaty concluded in 969-970AD/ 359H. between the Hamdanids emir Qarghūyā and Byzantium.<sup>134</sup> Remarkably there are some terms in this treaty which are obviously against Islamic law. Though it kept the Muslim right of levying Jizya (poll tax) on their non-Muslim subjects, it guarantees freedom and safety to any apostate who deserts his religion (Islam or Christianity) and converts to the other. Such provision is utterly against

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<sup>132</sup> - S.M. Stern, ‘A letter of the Byzantine emperor to the court of Spanish Umayyad caliph al-Hakim’, *al-Andalus*, 26 (1961) pp. 37-42, reprinted in idem, *Medieval Arabic and Hebrew thought* (London 1983) no. VI, esp. pp. 38-39.

<sup>133</sup> -See the notes of al-Qalqashandī on the basis of writing diplomatic treaties with non-Muslims. Scarcely Byzantine sources commented on the religious background of their emperor’s treaties with non-Christians. See: Genesios, *Regum libri quattuor*, pp. 20-21, English trans. A. Kaldellis, p. 24, also note 103; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā*, 14, pp. 7-8.

<sup>134</sup> -Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat al-ḥalab*, pp. 95-99. English trans. W. Farag, *The truce of Ṣafar*.

Islamic law concerning apostates.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore in this treaty Byzantines tried to set free some of the Christian slaves in Muslim hands, by giving some kind of asylum to the Christian slaves who escaped from their masters.<sup>136</sup> Most important this treaty imposed poll tax on the Muslim emir and his subjects.

On another occasion, after the treaty of 1027AD/ 418 H. between Byzantines and the Fatimīds, al-Maqrīzi narrates that “many of those who had been forced to convert to Islam in the reign of al-Ḥākim returned to Christianity”.<sup>137</sup> One may assume that this tolerated mass reconversion was a result of the terms of this treaty, or equally it could be just a sudden change of mind from the capricious caliph. Interestingly, Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, considers this as a miracle and sign of God’s mercy to the Christians.<sup>138</sup>

### The possibility of perpetual friendship

The Muslim legislators draw up some guidelines for the Muslim rulers in their diplomacy with non-Muslims. Among their terms was the issue of the time limit in treaties with non-Muslims. There is no explicit text either from the Qur’ān or from the Ḥadith dealing with the duration of the treaties, but the classical example of

<sup>135</sup> -Most of the Muslim theologians recommended execution of the apostate who left Islam and converted to any other religion, provided he was given a chance, between three days and one month to repent and change his mind upon persuasion. See Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 8, pp. 123-128.

<sup>136</sup> -Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat al-ḥalab*, p. 97. Seldom did Byzantium try to release Christian slaves from Muslim hands. A similar term was repeated in a 13<sup>th</sup> century treaty between Michael VIII Paleologos and the Mamlukid sultan Qalāwūn (1279-1290AD./ 678-689H.) in which the emperor tried to control the slave trade crossing Byzantine waters and protect any Christian slaves who might end up in Muslim hands. See the text of both treaties in al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā*, 14, pp. 72-78. C.f. M. Canard, ‘Un traité entre Byzance et l’Egypte au XIIIe siècle et les relations de Michael Paléologue avec les sultans mamlûks Baibars et Qalâ’ûn’ *Mélanges Gaudetroy-Demombynes*, (Cairo 1937) pp. 197-224, reprinted in idem: *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, n. IV.

<sup>137</sup> -Yaḥyā, ed. L. Cheikho, pp. 231-232; al-Maqrīzī, *‘Itti’āz*, II, p. 176; Ibn Aybak, *al-durrah al-muḍāḥ*, p. 298; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 185; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, the late Egyptian historian, recounts a strange story. He says that, when al-Ḥākim claimed godhead, the Christians and Jews, who had been forced to convert to Islam, used to beg him saying “My Lord, I wish to return to my old religion; and al-Ḥākim agreed to allow whoever asked him”, Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 4, p. 183.

<sup>138</sup> -Yaḥyā, ed. L. Cheikho, p. 232.



Muḥammad's treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyah, which lasted for ten years, was always the inspiration for the Muslim legislators.

Treaties with Byzantium should, according to Islamic law, take into consideration some crucial points. The main emphasis of the Islamic law is the basic duty to fight non-Muslim rulers until they become Muslim or pay al-Jizya. So Islamic law limits the length of a treaty to a period of 10 years, which could be renewed if this would be in the Muslim interest, and should never be a permanent truce with the enemy.<sup>139</sup> In the case of the lengthy war of between Byzantines and Muslims, we do have a few examples in which the Muslim rulers followed such a hard line of al-Shafi'i. In a meeting between the Faṭimid caliph al-Mu'izz and a Byzantine ambassador, the caliph rejected a Byzantine proposal of a permanent truce between the two sides, saying that:

Religion and the canon law (al-sharī'a) did not admit such a perpetual truce as he had asked for. Allah had sent his prophet Mohammed and set up the Imams after him from among his descendants in order to call mankind to his religion and to make holy war (Jihād), against the recalcitrant till they embrace the religion or paid al-Jizya being subdued (Qur'ān IX. 20).<sup>140</sup>

The caliph added that he would not contact the Byzantine emperor unless it would be of advantage to Islam and only for God's cause.<sup>141</sup> However, late Muslim legislators seem to take into account the weakness of the Muslim rulers and their need not only to pacify their non-Muslim counterparts but also the danger of being forced to pay Jizya to them. Late Muslim legislators accepted the extension of the friendship

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<sup>139</sup> -Al-Shafi'i, *al-Umm*, 4, p. 189; Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 246; see E. C. Bosworth, 'Byzantium and the Arabs', p. 5.

<sup>140</sup> -S. M. Stern, 'an embassy of the Byzantine emperor to the Fatimid caliph Mu'izz', Arabic text, pp. 251, English trans. pp. 245-246. The text quoted from: al-Qaḍī al-Nu'mān, *kitāb al-majalis wa al-Musāyarāt* (Book of the audiences and voyages).

<sup>141</sup> -S. M. Stern, 'An embassy of the Byzantine emperor', pp. 256 (Arabic text) p. 248 (English translation)

treaties with non-Muslims for up to 90 years and some tended to give absolute freedom to Muslim rulers to choose what would be in the interest of the Muslims as a whole.<sup>142</sup>

### **The sacred places in the treaties**

In a few cases in Byzantine-Muslim diplomacy there were some terms in the treaties concerning the sacred places, mainly the mosque of Constantinople. In 987 AD. / 377H. a treaty was concluded between the Faṭimid caliph in Egypt and Basil II, in which the Muslim caliph stipulated that all the Muslim prisoners in their land should be released and announcing the Khuṭbah for him in mosque of Constantinople.<sup>143</sup> Some years later in the treaty of 1027 AD/ 418H., a guarantee was given to refurbish and reopen the mosque of Constantinople, and to appoint a Mu'adhhdzin for it.<sup>144</sup>

Throughout Islamic history, it has been of political and religious importance to mention the name of the caliph or the Muslim ruler and to pray for him in the mosques at Friday prayer.<sup>145</sup> Within the 'Abbasid-Fatimid rivalry, it was crucially important to have their names mentioned in mosques all over the Muslim lands, so as to reflect their spiritual supremacy. One may suppose, the extreme importance of this practice in a mosque at the heart of the Byzantine capital would have been seen and

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<sup>142</sup> -See al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, 14, p. 7.

<sup>143</sup> -Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 4, pp. 151-152.

<sup>144</sup> -A person who calls the Muslims to pray in the prayers times.

<sup>145</sup> -Ibn Khaldūn says the khutabah is a unique phenomenon of the Islamic states. He says this tradition of praising the current caliph in the Friday prayer, and pray to Allah to save him and guide him as the Imam of all Muslims began shortly after Muḥammad. Later this simple prayer gained a special political importance as some kind of recognition of political supremacy. When the Muslim caliphate saw several small quasi-independent emirates, the sequences of the names mentioned and prayed for in the sermon take on a special importance: first, the name of the caliph, then the local emir and his heir. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqddimah* (Beirut 1971) pp. 269-270.

used as political-religious propaganda, and would reveal them as the sole representative of the Muslim world.<sup>146</sup>

In the diplomacy between Byzantines and Muslims, both sides exchanged presents, which were usually fine clothes, fabrics, gold or jewellery. From the Byzantine side, the emperors used to send with almost every envoy a number of Muslim prisoners of war as a present to pacify the Muslim ruler, and on one occasion they sent copies of the Qur'ān to some Muslim rulers.<sup>147</sup> It is not clear whether one may presume some kind of Byzantine respect for the Muslim sacred book, but at least this isolated case can show, more or less a recognition of the importance of the Qur'ān and a remarkable attempt to use it within the Byzantine diplomacy.

As for the Byzantines, only on a few occasions they expressed their theoretical responsibility for the Christian sacred places in Palestine and include terms concerning them. In the truce of Şafar, the Byzantine authorities demanded access to churches in the Muslim lands, and the right to send clerics and material help for these churches.

In a few cases some Muslim rulers were accused of being too friendly and sending presents to the Byzantine emperors, against their religious precept. In 974 AD /363H the Būyid emir 'Izz al-Dawlah sent a letter to the caliph al-Muḥī' upon his victory against Abī Tagh̄alb the Ḥamdanid, accusing the latter of sending horses, crosses and wine as presents to the emperor which is not acceptable in Islamic law.<sup>148</sup> Obviously, there is no reason to believe this alleged and sudden enthusiasm for Jihad from the Būyid emir who, with all his family, focused mainly on the internal affairs of Iraq and

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<sup>146</sup>- Some years later in 1055 /447 the empress Theodora changed this rule and allowed the Seljukids Sultan's name to be mentioned in the Constantinople's mosque. The caliph al-Mustansir reacted sharply and ordered immediately the seizure of the Jerusalem church, the arrest of the patriarch, the closure of several churches in Egypt and Syria and the impose of four years of poll tax over their Christian monks in advance. Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti 'āz*, 2, p. 230.

<sup>147</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'riḫ*, III, p. 1931.

Persia. However such accusations would be enough to impair the reputation of any Muslim emir. At the same time this letter and its accusation, true or not, reflect the importance of relations with Byzantium, whether peaceful or hostile, on the personal reputation and prestige of the Muslim emirs.

### Privileges of envoys

In the lengthy course of Byzantine-Muslim relations several missions were exchanged between the two sides. Muslim legislators indicate that the ambassadors of the Byzantine emperors (and the other members of the delegation) should be safe and allowed travelling safely and some even tend to recommend diplomatic immunity for them exactly on the line of modern diplomatic immunity.<sup>149</sup>

At the same time, some of these ambassadors used to bring with them merchandise, or personal belongings of their authorities; in such cases Muslim law imposes a normal tax on these goods,<sup>150</sup> and certain restrictions on this trade. It does not allow anyone to export to their own lands any weapons, slaves or goods which could help them against Muslims in any future struggle.<sup>151</sup>

Theoretically, if a Byzantine envoy was to stay more than one year in the Dar al-'Islām, his position would be changed to that of the ahl-al-Dhimmah, viz. the Christians and Jews under Islam, and he would have to obey the terms set by Muslim

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<sup>148</sup> - Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, 6, p. 491.

<sup>149</sup> -Abū Yūsuf, Ya'qūb, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, pp. 224-225. See M. Canard, 'Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes' *DOP* 18 (1964) pp. 35-65, reprinted in idem, *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, n. XIX, pp. 36-37.

<sup>150</sup> -Abū Yūsuf, Ya'qūb, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 224; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, 7, p. 18.

<sup>151</sup> -Abū Yūsuf, Ya'qūb, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 224

law (Shari'h).<sup>152</sup> Such a rule however seems to have been neglected, inasmuch as there were few cases in which the envoys stayed more than one year.<sup>153</sup>

In short, Byzantine envoys in the Muslim lands enjoyed honourable treatment in most cases. In 973 AD/ 363 H. a Byzantine envoy arrived in Cairo and the caliph ordered the traditional parade to be prepared. A certain Muslim cleric of Adhana of Thughur attended and it seems that he knew the Byzantine envoy personally, as he tried to set the caliph against the envoy saying: "this man is the enemy of Islam and he harms Muslims and Muslim prisoners of war". The caliph became furious at this comment and ordered the Muslim cleric to leave.<sup>154</sup> In 973AD / 363 H. the Byzantine ambassador to the Fatimid caliph in Egypt died, and the caliph sent his body in a coffin to Byzantium.<sup>155</sup> As Canard pointed out, these ambassadors were mostly under close surveillance by the Muslim authorities.<sup>156</sup> This fact sheds some light on a famous, yet disputed, Byzantine embassy to Baghdad, that is, the patriarch Photius and his alleged mission to Baghdad. All we know about this trip is one ambiguous sentence in a letter to his brother.<sup>157</sup> Some modern scholars suggest that the patriarch had a unique opportunity and enough time in his trip to spend in the great library of

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<sup>152</sup> -Abū Yūsuf, *Ya'qūb, Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 225; see C. E. Bosworth, 'Byzantium and the Arabs: war and peace', p. 6.

<sup>153</sup> -The case of Leo Choiosphaktes who stayed in Baghdad for 2 years (906- 908). See M. Canard, 'Deux episodes des relations diplomatiques arabo-byzantines au Xe siècle', reprinted no. XI in idem, *Byzance et les musulmans du proche Orient*, pp. 59-62.

<sup>154</sup> -Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, I, p.208-209.

<sup>155</sup> -Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, I, p. 214. Walker pointed out that the Byzantines would be suspicious of the sudden death of their ambassador in Cairo, and he suggested that this death was a probable cause of the Byzantine campaign against Syria a short time after. But it seems that the assumption on which he based his argument is just matter of guessing. C.f. Walker, 'The Crusade of John Tzimices', p. 314.

<sup>156</sup> - M. Canard, 'Les reations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabs', p. 37.

<sup>157</sup> -Photius, *The library*, I, p. 15.

Baghdad. This notion, however seems to be implausible and no more than guess work.<sup>158</sup>

The favourable treatment of the Byzantine ambassadors had some repercussions in Byzantine hagiography. There is a similar alleged trip to Baghdad by Constantine (the apostle of the Slavs), in which the hagiographer claims that the Byzantine ambassador engaged in polemical debates with Muslim scholars.<sup>159</sup> Remarkably, notwithstanding the hagiographical topos of the superiority of the Christian saint, the hagiographer substantially could not claim any maltreatment of his hero. There is at least one real occasion the Byzantine ambassador had a permit to visit a tomb of Saint Thomas in Edessa.<sup>160</sup>

Another Byzantine trip was taken to Baghdad, this time by the Cypriot bishop, Saint Demetrianus,<sup>161</sup> who took the risk and travelled to the court of the caliph to set free some of his folk.<sup>162</sup> Though the details of the whole trip are hazy and just take up only a few lines of the text, they allude to the fact that he was well treated by the authorities in Baghdad.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> -For a full discussion on Photius' trip, see F. Dovrnik, 'The embassies of Constantine-Cyril and Photius to the Arabs' in idem, *Photian and Byzantine ecclesiastical studies*, (London 1974) n. VII; P. Lemerle, *Byzantine humanism*, pp. 207; P. Magdalino, 'The road to Baghdad in the thought world of ninth century Byzantium' in L. Brubaker (ed.) *Byzantium in the ninth century: Dead or alive?* (Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies Publications, (London 1998) pp. 195-213.

<sup>159</sup> -Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts of our blessed teacher Konstantin the Philosopher, the first Enlightener of the Slavic tribe*, In I. Duichev, *Kiril and Methodius, founders of Slavonic writing: a collection of sources and critical studies*, (New York 1985) pp. 55-58; for a full discussion of this alleged embassy and the theological debates. Infra chapter 4, pp. 235-237.

<sup>160</sup> -Theophanes. Cont., pp. 455-5456. See M. Canard, 'Les relations politique et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes', p. 38.

<sup>161</sup> -H. Grégoire, 'Saint Démétrianos, évêque de Chytri (île de Chypre) *BZ*, 16 (1907) pp. 204-240; See Jenkins, 'The mission of St. Demetrianus of Cyprus to Baghdad' Reprinted in idem, *Studies on Byzantine History of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century*. N. XVI.

<sup>162</sup> -In 911AD/ 298 A.H. A Muslim fleet under the command of Damian stormed parts of Cyprus, inasmuch as they co-operated with the Byzantines against the Muslims, and violated the treaty, which keeps their situations neutral between the two rivals. Obviously the Muslim raid was devastating and the fleet took many prisoners of war. Al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 4, p. 283; H. Grégoire, *Saint Démétrianos*, pp. 232- 233. See the repercussions of this in the letter of the patriarch Nicholas I who complains bitterly. Nicolas I, *Letters*, pp. 5-11. C.f. Jenkins, 'The mission of St. Demetrianus of Cyprus to Baghdad'; A. Vasliev, *Byzance et le Arabes*, II: 1, pp. 212-213.

<sup>163</sup> -H. Grégoire, 'Saint Démétrianos', p. 233.

In 974AD/ 364H. when the Byzantine ambassador entered Cairo, it was a popular occasion and the citizens of Cairo closed their shops and went into the streets to see him.<sup>164</sup> The same popular parade was repeated at the reception of the Byzantine ambassadors in Raqādah (North Africa), under the rule of the Aghlabids.<sup>165</sup> Interestingly, the Byzantine ambassadors had some personal and informal conversations with the Muslim caliphs.<sup>166</sup>

As for the Arab envoys to Constantinople, evidently they enjoyed a similar honourable treatment. In the embassy of Naṣr b. al-Azhar to the emperor Michael III, the Muslim ambassador praised the emperor who treated him kindly and allocated a special house for him.<sup>167</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have a detailed account of the residences or life of the Muslim envoys in Constantinople. Yet we know about such special houses from other non-Muslim envoys.<sup>168</sup>

The emperor Alexander allowed Arab hostages to witness his trial of Saint Euthymius after scandal of his failed attempt to confiscate money from the partisans of Euthymius (although the purpose of this was to occupy empty seats, left by the angry members of senate).<sup>169</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī narrates that there was a special sea-gate connected to the imperial palace allocated especially to the Muslim ambassadors.<sup>170</sup>

Al-Khaṣīb al-Baghdādī, narrates that al-Qāḍī (judge) Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī had been sent as an envoy for 'Aḍad al-Dawlah to the Byzantine emperor

<sup>164</sup> -Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, I, p. 225.

<sup>165</sup> -Ibn 'Idharay, *al-bayān al-mughrib*, (Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne) I, p. 140.

<sup>166</sup> -Al-Maqrīzī narrates that there was a strange dialogue between the caliph and the Byzantine ambassador. In this, the Byzantine ambassador said that he did not see the same glory of the Fatimid court as he had seen in the first time in Maḥdya (the Fatimid capital in north Africa before Cairo) and the caliph felt so depressed even he died soon after that. This narrative seems to be fictitious but it reflects the well treatment of Byzantine ambassadors in the Muslim lands. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, pp. 66-71; Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, I, p. 226

<sup>167</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'rikh*, III: 3, p. 1450.

<sup>168</sup> -See the bitter complaints from Liudprand of Cremona the Latin envoy of King Otto I (the German king from 936), and Holy Roman emperor (962-973). Liudprand was in Constantinople in 968. Remarkably he began the report of his mission by criticising the place allocated to him and his fellows. Liudprand of Cremona, *The works*, p. 235.

<sup>169</sup> -Vita Euthymii, p. 125.

Basil II,<sup>171</sup> who was informed of the reputation of the Muslim ambassador, and knew that the latter, would never kiss the ground, as the envoys were expected to do. So, the emperor thought to trick and humiliate the Muslim envoy by forcing him to enter the court through a low door, forcing him to kneel in his presence. However al-Bāqillānī realised the trick and entered the room backwards.<sup>172</sup>

However, the honourable treatment of embassies, which was generally accepted and adopted between Muslims and Byzantines, had some notable exceptions. Sometimes they were insulted, or even killed. A member of a Byzantine delegation to Sayf al-Dawla was killed; Sayf al-Dawla apologised that the killer (a Qaramaite) was drunk and sent Dyah (blood money) for the murdered envoy, but the emperor Nikephoros demanded that the Muslim killer be handed over to him, but Sayf al-Dawla ignored his request.<sup>173</sup> Presumably he could not risk provoking his dangerous allies the Qaramitans. On the Byzantine side, we have only a few examples of maltreatment of the Muslim envoys. In 965 the desperate populations of Maṣīṣah and Ṭarsūs sent an envoy to offer tribute to the emperor Nikephoros Phokas, who refused their request and burnt their letter on the head of the ambassador till his beard caught fire.<sup>174</sup>

### Treatment of the sacred places

Evidently, the tenth century witnessed a real Byzantine crusade against Muslim mosques in north Syria. In almost every successful raid, any mosque they could find was destroyed or burnt or defaced, or even turned into a stable for horses, in their mockery against Islam they put up crosses, and rang bells inside the captured

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<sup>170</sup> -Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-ishrāf*, p. 158.

<sup>171</sup> -On the political background of this mission see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours during the reign of Basil II*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Birmingham 1979) pp. 82-99.

<sup>172</sup> -Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghḍādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād*, 5, pp. 379-380; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Akhhbār al-adhkiā'* (Stories of the intellectuals) ed. M. al-Khūlī (Cairo 1970) p.118; Ibn al-Aṭhīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, pp. 110-111.



mosques.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, in a few cases they desecrated Muslim cemeteries and destroyed them as well. The Muslim sources list a large number of occasions on which their sacred places were burnt and destroyed.

In 905 AD/ 293H. Byzantine raid on the suburbs of Aleppo destroyed some mosques.<sup>176</sup> In 926 AD./ 314H. Byzantine army disturbed the Muslim tombs near Melitene.<sup>177</sup> Two years later Byzantine soldiers stormed a mosque in Khilāt, and replaced its rostrum with a cross.<sup>178</sup> Later in 953AD./ 342 H. they destroyed the mosques of Sirūj.<sup>179</sup>

The campaigns of Nikephoros Phokas in particular targeted Muslim mosques. In 962 AD./ 350 H. the Byzantine emperor Nikephoros Phokas ordered the destruction of the mosque of 'Aīn Zarba.<sup>180</sup> Next year Byzantine armies burnt the mosques in Aleppo, upon controlling the city.<sup>181</sup> In 965AD/ 354H. Emperor Nikephoros Phokas converted Ṭarsūs' mosques to stables for his horses, and ordered their rostrums to be burnt.<sup>182</sup> In 967AD/ 357H. during his campaigns against northern Syria, he ordered the mosques in Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān, Ma'arrat Masrīn, Kafr Ṭāb, Shayzar, and Ḥamāh to be destroyed. Remarkably Ibn al-'Adīm simply says, "Nikephoros seized eighteen rostrums".<sup>183</sup>

This policy adopted by Nikephoros Phokas was considerably softened in the reign of John Tzimiskes and Basil II. There are only a few occasions of destroying

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<sup>173</sup> -Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p.86.

<sup>174</sup> -Ibn Miskawyh, *Kitāb tajārib al-umam*, 6, p. 210.

<sup>175</sup> -In 927 AD./ 315H. Byzantine military entered the mosque of Sumayṣaṭ, and rang the bells, mocking Muslims. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 186; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 158 (he says the king had put his tent in the great Mosque of the city).

<sup>176</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 115.

<sup>177</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 185.

<sup>178</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 198; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah*, 3, p. 316.

<sup>179</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 342.

<sup>180</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 168.

<sup>181</sup> -Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, p. 3; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 168.

<sup>182</sup> -Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, p. 14; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 171 (Ibn al-'Adīm does not mention this, Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 84).

<sup>183</sup> -Ibn al-'Adīm, p. 93; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 32.

Muslim mosques. In 983AD./ 373 H, the Byzantine army forced its way into Hims, and destroyed its mosque.<sup>184</sup> In 1030/ 422 H. the Byzantine troops destroyed the mosques of Edessa<sup>185</sup>

On the Muslim side, we know that the early Muslim armies were ordered to destroy no churches nor to kill any monks.<sup>186</sup> However, taking into consideration the fact that the Muslims were much weaker and considerably less offensive in the tenth century, we have fewer examples of Byzantine churches being destroyed. Among these few examples are the following: in 900 AD./ 287 H. there was a raid against Byzantine lands, in which the Muslim army destroyed some churches and captured some monks.<sup>187</sup> In 904 AD./ 328 H. John Kaminiates bitterly laments the treatment of his city Thessalonika and complains of the Muslim insults to some of its churches.<sup>188</sup> In the same year, Sayf al-Dawla ordered to destroy "a great Christian church".<sup>189</sup> Similarly in 985 AD./ 375 H. Qarghūyā قرعويه attacked the famous Monastery of Symeon al-Halbī, killed some of the monks there, and captured others who escaped.<sup>190</sup> Remarkably, al-Muqaddasī narrates that the Muslim armies used to target the Byzantine churches in their raids. They were particularly looking for eunuchs to

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<sup>184</sup> -Ibn al-'Adīm, p. 102; Ibn Aybak, *al-Durah al-mudyah*, p. 211.

<sup>185</sup> -Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, p. 356, However, the Armenian late historian Matthew of Edessa speaks in detail about the events in Edessa, but does not mention any thing about the fate of the Muslims mosques, paying more attention only to the Muslims' intensive attack against the cathedral of Saint Sophia, Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, p. 53,

<sup>186</sup> - Ibn 'Asākr, I, p. 133; Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Bātrīq, *Kitāb al-tārīkh*, II, pp. 9-10.

<sup>187</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 145.

<sup>188</sup> - John Kaminates, *De expugnatione Thessalonicae*, p. 52; German trans. G. Böhlig, p. 74

<sup>189</sup> - Ibn Zāfar, cited by M. Canard, *Sayf Al Daula, Recueil de texts relatifs à l'émir Sayf al Daula*, p. 74.

<sup>190</sup> -Yāḥya, ed. L. Cheikho, p. 165; Ibn al-'Adīm says that the monastery was a huge building and fortified castle. W. Sunbers hypothesises that this monastery was an advanced outpost of the Byzantine frontier on the borders, see W Saunders, 'Qal'at Seman: a frontier fort of the tenth and eleventh centuries', In S. Mitchell (ed.) *Armies and frontiers in Roman and Byzantine Anatolia: Proceedings of a colloquium held at University College (Swansea 1981)*. British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, Monograph no. 5 (Ankara 1983) pp. 291-303.

capture, as valuable goods wanted in the Muslim lands.<sup>191</sup> In southern Italy churches were often plundered in successive Muslim raids.<sup>192</sup>

As for the sacred books which were obtained as booty, al-Shafi‘ī says that the books of non-Muslims, which fell into the Muslim hands, should be looked after and the rulers should call upon anyone who could translate them. And if they are of science or medicine, they should be used to the benefit of the Muslims, but if they contain any *shirk* شرك (polytheism) they must be destroyed and Muslims should use their materials for other useful purposes.<sup>193</sup> One may assume that this term applied to any copies of the Bible which were looted in Muslim raids.

### Legendary Muslim tombs and their mircales

During one of the early Muslim raids against Byzantium,<sup>194</sup> Abū Ayūb al-Anṣārī, companion of the prophet died, and according the Muslim traditions, he asked his fellow Muslim soldiers to bury him in the nearest possible position of the city, so they buried him under the wall of Constantinople. This tomb allegedly became a source of Baraka (blessing); even the Christian citizens of Constantinople used to venerate it.<sup>195</sup> There is another similar late Muslim legend that “the Rum (Byzantines) there (in Sicily) used to venerate the tomb of Asd b. el-Furāt (conquer of the island, d. 828 / 213H.)” And they used to pray near it when they needed rain (استسقاء).<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> -Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, p. 242.

<sup>192</sup> - See for example the narrative of Liudprand of Cremona, p. 144.

<sup>193</sup> - Al-Shafi‘ī, *al-Umm*, 4, p. 263.

<sup>194</sup> -The expedition of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya in 668- 686/ 48-49.

<sup>195</sup> -Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā’rīkh*, II: 1, p. 89. He mentions his name in the list of the distinguished persons who took part in this campaign, but did not attribute any miracles to his tomb; while Ibn al-Athīr, (a 13<sup>th</sup> century historian) *al-kāmil*, 3, pp. 227-228; quotes the narrative of al-Ṭabarī, and adds the narrative of the miracles attributed to this tomb and the Byzantines’ veneration of it. C.E. Bosworth, ‘Byzantium and the Arabs’, p. 3; M. Canard, ‘Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople dans l’histoire et dans le légende’ *JA* 208 (1926) pp. 61-121, reprinted in idem *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, N. 1, esp. p. 73.

## Religious relics

While Christian veneration of the icons, cross and saints' relics was always a crucial point in Christian-Muslim polemics;<sup>197</sup> the Muslim victories in the seventh and eight centuries brought the Christian holy places in the east (with their legacy of rich relics) under the Muslim rule. But these Christian holy places stayed as an inspiration in the Byzantine world. Since Helena (the mother Emperor Constantine), the cult of relics had flourished in Byzantium, and the successful excavation of the empress for the True Cross in the holy lands was always admired in Byzantium.

The tenth century saw intensive efforts on the part of several Byzantine emperors to follow the lead of Helena and bring back all possible relics from the east. It might be an overestimating or even misjudging to consider its importance and to consider the deep Byzantine desire to obtain these relics and return them to Constantinople as a religious motive of the Byzantine warfare against the Muslims in the tenth century. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the full role of these relics and whatever affect they may have had on the course of the political and military relations between the Byzantines and Muslims. Undoubtedly, the Byzantine public celebrations and lavish ceremonies held at the reception of these relics<sup>198</sup> indicate the extreme importance of such sacred trophies gained from the wars against Muslims. John Tzimiskes proudly counts the relics he obtained from his campaigns in Syria.<sup>199</sup> He speaks about the relics he found in Jabala, which include, the sandals of Christ, an old icon of Christ, to which some miracles were attributed, and which was

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<sup>196</sup> -Ibn Aybak, *al-durah al-muḍyah*, p. 30.

<sup>197</sup> -For a comprehensive study on the issue of the veneration of the cross between Muslims and Christians see M. N Swanson, *Folly to the Hunfā': The cross of Christ in Arabic Christian/Muslim controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries AD*, Ph.D. thesis, 2vols. Pontificio Istituto di studi Arabi e d'Islamistica (Rome 1992).

<sup>198</sup> - Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, p. 33.

described by Leo the Deacon as “a gift from heaven”,<sup>200</sup> as well as some of the hair of John the Baptist, and relics of Saint James of Nisibis.<sup>201</sup>

One of the most valuable Christian relics in the east was the Mandyllion (handkerchief), which was alleged to have an image of Christ’s face imprinted on it when he used it to wipe his face.<sup>202</sup> John Skylitzes, the eleventh-century Byzantine historian says that the people of Edessa offered to give this sacred relic to the Byzantines in return for ending the attack on the city.<sup>203</sup> The relic was received and handled with great honour and later moved “in a golden box” to Constantinople.<sup>204</sup> The Muslim sources narrate that the Byzantines offered the releasing of some (or all?) of their Muslim prisoners in return for this sacred relic; this demand was an unusual one even, needing a decision from the caliph himself, who consulted a group of clerics to deal with such an unprecedented request.<sup>205</sup>

In Byzantium itself, these relics were of extreme importance, even requiring a special magnificent celebration in the honour of the newly discovered sandals of Christ and the hair of John the Baptist. On such days there was great rejoicing in Constantinople. Liz James emphasised recently the political and personal importance of the so-called imperial relic hunting from the east, especially in the case of emperors

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<sup>199</sup> - Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, pp. 29- 32.

<sup>200</sup> - He narrates the alleged miracle attributed to this icon. When a Christian man moved to another house he forgot this Icon. Later a certain Jew bought the same house. On seeing this icon, he stabbed it by his spear, immediately some blood and water exuded from the icon, exactly like what happened with Jesus on the cross, and the man became scared. Soon the Christians discovered this story, and forced their way into the house and took their precious icon, which was moved later with great honour to Constantinople: Leo the Deacon, *Histoira*, p. 166 (German trans. F. Loretto pp 150-151).

<sup>201</sup> - Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, p. 29-32.

<sup>202</sup> -Theophanes. Cont., p. 432; Leo. Gramm. 326; Symeon magister, pp. 748-749; Zonaras, XVI, 20: IV, 65; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6 p. 294; Bar Hebraeus, I, pp. 162-163 (Bar Hebraeus puts this event in 942. For more about the authenticity of this story, see Munitiz et al. (eds.) *The letter of the three patriarchs*, p. 34. For more details on the Byzantine operation see A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II: 1, pp. 298-302.

<sup>203</sup> - John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, pp. 231-322 (German trans. J. Thurn, p. 271).

<sup>204</sup> - Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, p. 71 11-12(German trans. F. Loretto p. 70).

<sup>205</sup> - Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 3, p. 278.

of non-imperial origin such as Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes. It seems very important for them to get such an admiration by importing these sacred relics.<sup>206</sup>

At the same time, there were some accounts of Muslim relics, though there is no veneration of icons or relics in Islam, there was some admiration for Muslim relics, especially those which belonged to the prophet. However, in Byzantine-Muslim relations, there were some occasions on which these Islamic relics played a remarkable part. The Byzantine historian Leo the deacon narrates:

He (Emperor Nikephoros Phokas) sent a legation to the Caliph in Carthage, and handed over him as a gift, the sword of ... Muḥammad, which has been seized when a castle in Palestine was stormed.<sup>207</sup>

It is worthy noting here that the sources on both sides had constantly reflected the animosity between Muslims and Christians as regards the veneration of icons and sacred relics. In several Christian works, there are a number of cases of Muslims who stabbed, cut, destroyed, or merely insulted a certain icon or a church, and according to these sources, that blasphemer was soon punished by some miracle of the saint's relics, or through the prayers of the pious Christians, who had been hurt by such blasphemy. In the vita of Saint Theotkiste of Lesbos, (10<sup>th</sup> century), we are told about a "commander of the Cretan navy"<sup>208</sup> who followed the lead of some other Muslim rulers in searching for columns of old churches in order to use them in some new Muslim buildings. Our man, however, tried in vain to carry out the ciborium of a

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<sup>206</sup> -L. James, 'Bearing gifts from the east: Imperial relic hunters abroad', unpublished paper: 23<sup>rd</sup>. Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, *Eastern approaches to Byzantium*, University of Warwick March 1999)

<sup>207</sup> -The legation used this venerable Muslim gift to persuade the caliph to set free the Patrikios Niketas, who was captured during an unsuccessful Byzantine raid against Sicily. Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, p. 76<sub>1</sub> (German trans. F. Loretto, p. 74).

<sup>208</sup> -Vita St. Theoktiste of Lesbos, in A. Talbot (ed.) *The holy women of Byzantium*, The hagiographer named the Muslim admiral, Nisiris. The translator, (A. C. Hero) suggests that he might be modelled on such historical figures as Leo of Tripoli. p. 107, n. 48.

church there, but failing to do so, he decided to smash it. Later he was punished and was drowned at sea when his ship sank.<sup>209</sup>

Similarly, but on a smaller scale, the Muslim sources speak of the miracles which punished those Byzantines who did not respect Muslim sacred places. Ibn Rusta tells us that caliph al-Walīd I (705-715) had called some Byzantine workers to help rebuild the prophet's mosque, but one of them found the place empty so he tried to urinate on the tomb of Muḥammad and was immediately paralysed. This story seems to be fictitious, as the early sources mention the help sent by Byzantium to the caliph, but contain no record of this story,<sup>210</sup> which one can consider as a repercussion of similar Christian stories found in the Christian Arabic literature.

### **Merchants and their religious facilities**

During the course of the Byzantine-Muslim relations, the movement of trade was remarkably continuous. It was hindered occasionally by war, but soon it resumed again, once given the opportunity. It seems that the authorities on both sides were keen to maintain such profitable trade. This trade between the two religious antagonists still, in my opinion, requires further examination and evaluation.

My main concern here, however, is the religious facilities accorded to the merchants as well as the restrictions on the movement of trade between the two rivals. Unfortunately, the scanty details we have about the lives and practice of the merchants does not shed any light on the daily lives of these merchants in foreign lands.

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<sup>209</sup> -Vita St. Theoktiste of Lesbos: in A. Talbot (ed.) *The holy women of Byzantium*, p. 107.

<sup>210</sup> -Ibn Rustah, p. 99. Both al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn al-Athīr, (quoting almost verbatim from al-Ṭabarī) narrate that the caliph al-Walīd I requested some help from the Byzantine emperor who send him an enormous amount of mosaic and some Byzantine skilled workers, but remarkably neither of them mentions this story, which seems to be fictitious. Al-Ṭabarī, II: 2, p. 1194; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 4, p. 109. Ibn 'Asākr (12<sup>th</sup>. Century) has a similar narrative, that the same caliph requested help from

In Byzantium, our main source, known as the Book of the Eparch and attributed to the emperor Leo VI,<sup>211</sup> deals with the trade and merchants in Constantinople. This manual of law speaks of two different kinds of Syrian merchant. The first group were allowed to stay in the *mitata* (ἐν τοὺς μιτάτοις),<sup>212</sup> for a maximum period of 3 months,<sup>213</sup> While the other group, who presumably were immigrants, as Lopez points out,<sup>214</sup> stayed for ten years and “shared the privileges of the native guild of *prandiopratai*”. They may be Christian Arabs who emigrated to Constantinople or equally they could be Muslim renegades who were encouraged by the Byzantines to immigrate and settle there in return for tax privileges.<sup>215</sup>

A Muslim source says: "For the Muslims in Constantinople there is a hostel (Khan), and they enjoy honour and great esteem from the (Rūm). This is because the major part of the latter's revenue is the customs (maks) which they collect from the merchants".<sup>216</sup> One can suppose that this group of Merchants had their own mosque inside this hostel, where they can practise their religion and observe their religious diet freely, and on Fridays they could possibly pray together in the city's mosque.<sup>217</sup>

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the Byzantine emperor to build the mosque Damascus, and there is no story of miracles in this. Ibn 'Asākr, I, p. 202.

<sup>211</sup> - E. H. Freshfield, *Roman law in the later Roman Empire: Byzantine guilds, professional and commercial, Book of the Eparch*, (Cambridge 1938).

<sup>212</sup> - This word μιτάτον meant the Lodgings of foreign ambassadors. See Lopez, 'The foreigners in Byzantium', p. 347. At the same time it was used as a place to store and distribute the baggage animals for the army. According to the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus there were *Mitata* of Asia or Phrygia. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three treatises on imperial military*, p. 99.

<sup>213</sup> - Book of the Eparch, p. 20.

<sup>214</sup> - Book of the Eparch, p. 19; c.f. Lopez, 'The Foreigners in Byzantium', p. 343.

<sup>215</sup> - On this Byzantine policy see Ch. 3.

<sup>216</sup> - V. Minorsky, 'Marvazi on the Byzantines', p. 462.

<sup>217</sup> - In the letter of the Patriarch Nicholas I, he says "the oratory is set apart for the use of members of your sect". Though he is speaking, in the context of prisoners of war, his words refer to all the Muslims in Constantinople. Nicholas I, *Letters*, p. 377. S. Reinert convincingly supports this notion, inasmuch as the Fatimid desire to obtain spiritual control over this mosque would mean this mosque was more than "exclusive preserve of prisoners". See: S. Reinert, 'The Muslim Presence in Constantinople, 9th-15th Centuries: Some Preliminary Observations', in H. Ahrweiler, and A. E. Laiou (eds.) *Studies on the internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington DC 1998) p. 137.



On the Muslim side, in 996AD./386 H., in the streets of Cairo a mob rose against the Byzantine merchants, while the number of victims came to 160, there were some survivors.<sup>218</sup> These numbers certainly reflect the level of trade. Yaḥyā alludes to the wealth of these merchants.<sup>219</sup> Remarkably the caliph, despite his supposed deep sorrow for his burnt fleet, punished the Muslim looters and returned any remaining goods to the Byzantine merchants,<sup>220</sup> which reflects his desire to maintain the presence of these merchants. It is extremely important to realise that the mob revolt was soon directed against the Melkite churches in Cairo. This common misfortune for the houses (khans), which were the residence of the Byzantine merchants and the Melkite church, suggests that they may have had their own church and religious facilities in Egypt by the permission of the authorities.

The Muslim rulers' tolerant policy towards the Christian (Byzantine and Italian) merchants was severely criticised by some Muslims. Ibn Ḥawqal accused the Byzantine merchants of being spies, and complained bitterly against the Muslim rulers for welcoming them. He blamed the Muslims for allowing these merchants to carry to their land weapons and expensive goods out of the Muslim lands while Muslims gained only trivial profits.<sup>221</sup>

It was well known that the merchants were, in some cases, professional spies,<sup>222</sup> which may have affected the restrictions imposed upon them in foreign lands. There are some narratives from both sides; Byzantines and Muslims confirm this fact,

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<sup>218</sup> -The revolt of the mob has directed against the Byzantine merchants after the burning of the newly built Fatimid fleet in Cairo, which was followed by rumours and accusations directed against the same Merchants. Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 447; Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, I p., 290; for a wider discussion of the Byzantine-Muslim relations at this time see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp. 250-251. It is noteworthy that Māqrīzī says the Byzantines who burnt the fleet were prisoners of war held in Cairo near the shipyard. However one tends to accept the narrative of Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, who was an eyewitness and he as Melkite may have had some kind of communications with these Byzantine merchants.

<sup>219</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 447; Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, I, p., 290.

<sup>220</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 447; Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, I, p., 290.

<sup>221</sup> - Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb surat al-'arḍ*, p. 198.

which naturally affected the Byzantine attitude towards these people. The Arab and Byzantine sources speak about Muslim spies inside the city of Constantine.<sup>223</sup> Another narrative by a Muslim historian, al-Maqrīzī, says that the Fatimid vizier Abī Naṣr al-Filāhī had spies in Constantinople,<sup>224</sup> presumably they were simply Muslim merchants in the city.

### Religious restrictions on trade

Since religious zeal was colouring almost every aspect of life and the relationships between the two powers, trade was no exception. Both sides tried to set up restrictions over the trade and the nature of the goods, especially military ones, such as horses or wood.

Islamic law permits trade with non-Muslims and allowing their merchants to enter the Muslim lands, even if they carry with them wine or pigs, which are not allowed for Muslims; but it clearly forbids the export of any material of a military nature as well as slaves to enemy countries.<sup>225</sup> A few hard-line Muslim legislators went further, seeking to prevent the carrying of copies of the Qur'ān to non-Muslim lands, even if they were carried by Muslims.<sup>226</sup> On the Byzantine side, the list of forbidden products which were not allowed to be exported outside the Byzantine lands was well known.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> - G. Dennis, *Three Byzantine military treatises*, p. 123.

<sup>223</sup> - John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, p. 158<sub>23</sub> (German trans. J. Thurn, p. 195.)

<sup>224</sup> - Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, 227.

<sup>225</sup> - Abū Yūsuf, Ya'qūb, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 226; Ibn Farḥūn al-Mālkī, *Tabṣirat al-ḥukkām fī usūl al-'aqdiah wa manāḥij al-aḥkām* (The guide for the rulers in the principles of judgement) (Beirut 1995) II, 270.

<sup>226</sup> - Ibn Farḥūn al-Mālkī, *Tabṣirat al-ḥukkām*, II, p. 270.

<sup>227</sup> - This list contains, gold, silk and slaves. *Book of the Eparch*, p. 17, 26; Liudprand of Cremona, *The works*, p. 267. See R. S. Lopez, 'Silk industry in the Byzantine Empire', *Speculum* 20 (1945) p. 26.

Islamic and Byzantine sources are clear about the religious motivation of such arrangements. In a letter from Muḥammad b. Ṭughj al-Ikhshīdīd (935-946) to the Byzantine emperor Romanos Lecapenos, the Muslim ruler says'

As for what you have sent in trade, we allowed your men to do it, and to sell and buy whatever they like and select, inasmuch as we found all of it (the merchandise?) is not among what our religion and policy forbid us to do.<sup>228</sup>

It seems that there were no serious attempts to blockade the trade with Muslims from Byzantium.<sup>229</sup> Yet there were some attempts to impose a naval blockade against the trade to and from the Muslim lands, as early as the seventh century, followed by later attempts in the early ninth century.<sup>230</sup>

In the tenth century John Tzimiskes sent a special delegation to Venice to prevent the Italian traders from exporting military goods, weapons and ship timbers to the Muslims. Under this pressure the Venetians finally agreed, "It is a great sin to supply such assistance to a pagan people, who through it are able to overcome or to harm Christians".<sup>231</sup> The religious motive appears clearly as a common factor between Byzantium and Venice, beside the emperor's threats.

On the local level, Byzantine authorities watched with hatred the growing land trade over the borders. Unfortunately the details and scale of such trade are hazy; presumably it comprised foodstuffs on a small scale, but it did provoke the authorities in Constantinople and we have seen they were recommended to crack down on this

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<sup>228</sup> - Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, 7, p. 18.

<sup>229</sup> - A. Lewis, *Naval power and trade in the Mediterranean AD 500-1100*, (New Jersey 1951) p. 172.

<sup>230</sup> - A. Lewis, *Naval power*, pp. 82-83, 116, 122.

<sup>231</sup> -R. S. Lopez, and I. W. Raymond, *Medieval trade in the Mediterranean world: illustrative documents translated with introductions and notes*, Oxford University Press (London 1955) p. 334

trade.<sup>232</sup> Lewis points out the coincidence between the governmental blockade against the Muslim trade and the revolutions in the Byzantine coastal areas, where the profitable trade with Muslims was lost.<sup>233</sup>

Later, in the tenth century, circa 987 AD/ 377 H. in a treaty between Fatimides in Egypt and Byzantium, there is a significant term, according to which the trade between the two states will be restored, and Muslims will be allowed to import whatever they need from Byzantine lands.<sup>234</sup> Such a term may indicate some previous restrictions on trade or at least on the nature of the merchandise exported to Muslim lands.

In sum, the religious element had its own deep influence on Muslim-Byzantine relations. While religious zeal was a clear motive for war between the antagonists, the generally good diplomatic and social relations were the other side of the coin.

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<sup>232</sup> - Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, p. 157.

<sup>233</sup> - A. Lewis, *Naval power*, p. 190. Actually he considers this as more than a mere coincidence.

<sup>234</sup> -Ibn Tgharī Bardī, *al-nujūm al-zāhirah*, 4, p. 151.

## Chapter Three

# Religious Minorities between Byzantines and Muslims

A few years after Muḥammad's death, the Muslim armies annihilated the Persians, and routed several Byzantine armies. As a result, the Muslims gained Egypt and Syria, which became a part of the new growing Islamic power base. The great Christian Patriarchates in the east (Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch) also fell under Muslim control. Henceforth, their relations with the Byzantine Church and empire came under the watchful eye of the Muslims.

As for the great eastern Churches, this was seen as a temporary reprieve from the often repressive and intolerant policies administered by the Byzantine Empire.<sup>1</sup> The schism that existed between Byzantium and the eastern churches was very deep. John Catholicus, the Armenian patriarch and historian of the tenth century, refused an invitation to visit the Byzantine court, saying, "I decided not to go, thinking that people might look askance at my going there, and assume that I sought communion with the Chalcedonians".<sup>2</sup> The Egyptian Coptic bishop and writer, Severus b. al-Muqaffa' calls them "The infidel Chalcedonians".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> -See the comments of the non-Chalcedonians historians, such as John of Nikiu, who strongly condemns the Byzantines for breaking the unity of the Church, and for their severity towards Egypt, John of Nikiu, p. 62. See Arnold, *The preaching of Islam*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>2</sup> - John Catholicus, *History*, p. 231.

## The Melkite church between Byzantines and Muslims.

It is well-known from the Arabic sources that a large number of Greeks or Arab Chalcedonians fled to the Byzantine lands in the aftermath of the Arabic invasions,<sup>4</sup> and gradually, thereafter, the number of Melkite Christians virtually faded into obscurity. This came about either through the loss of spiritual support from their mother church in Constantinople, or through the efforts of the other Christian sects to restore them to their non-Chalcedonian doctrines,<sup>5</sup> or through conversion to Islam. Whatever the reason by the tenth century, according to al-Mas'ūdī, the Melkite Christians constituted a remarkably small minority in Islamic lands.<sup>6</sup>

Hugh Kennedy offers convincing reasons for the supposed Muslim hostility towards the Melkite church. He states that the urban nature of the Melkite populations, which often placed them near the Muslim ruling class, the wealth of their buildings (inherited from the imperial era) and the ongoing Byzantine-Muslim struggle, generated a lasting suspicion from Muslim rulers.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, one could state that the lack of influential doctors and writers of the Melkite church, in comparison to other Christian sects, deprived them of the much needed assistance and intervention from such figures who could have reached the caliph and softened any harsh treatment meted out by the Muslim emirs.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the wealth of the Christian churches, in a strictly material sense, coupled with the Muslim sovereigns' desire to obtain some of the beautifully sculpted foundation columns which adorned and supported some of these monumental edifices, gravely provoked the displeasure,

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<sup>3</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> - Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 129, English trans., P. Hitti, p. 189. (He did not indicate whether these people were just Greek or Melkite Arabs).

<sup>5</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: I, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> - See the notice of al-Mas'ūdī about their small number in his time, al-Mas'ūdī, *al-Tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf*, p. 146.

<sup>7</sup> - H. Kennedy, 'The Melkite church', p. 334.

<sup>8</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, pp. 125, 150.

not only of the Melkite community, but of other Christians sects as well.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Muslims were often influenced by various plots which were orchestrated by other Arab Christians against the Melkite community. This secretly gave strength to the notion that the Melkite still felt strong links with the Byzantine Empire, thus provoking the animosity of the Muslim rulers against them.<sup>10</sup>

It is noteworthy that the quarrels between different Christian sects did, on some occasions, attract the attention and intervention of the Muslim rulers. Christian Arabic sources are full of stories which reflect the bitter hatred between the Chalcedonians and the non-Chalcedonians. Ibn al-Muqaffa' the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria narrates bitterly some conspiracies of the Melkites against the Copts.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Patriarchs of the east and Byzantium**

Hugh Kennedy pointed out recently that the Byzantine-Muslim war meant simply that relations between Constantinople and the patriarchs of the east were "virtually non-existent".<sup>12</sup> Yet on some occasions contacts were made between the imperial court and the church in Byzantium, with the eastern churches. However, because of the close Muslim monitoring of such communications, and the deep chasm between Byzantium and the eastern churches, any contact would have been quite fragile and tenuous, and within a short time would have been discontinued in any event.

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<sup>9</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, p. 286.

<sup>10</sup> -It is of extreme importance that, in later Mamluk Egypt, we have texts of two edicts about the appointment of both Melkite and Coptic patriarchs. Al-Qalqashandī, advised the future state writers to be careful and added a special phrase, which warns the Melkite patriarch from anything which might come from beyond the sea, that is to say Byzantium; and the Coptic against any thing might come from south Egypt (Abyssinia and Nubia). Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'it al-inshā'*, 13, p. 100; Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II: 2, p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> -Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, p. 122, 150. Equally he (p. 148) mentions some Coptic plots against the Melkites. Again he (pp. 174-180) writes in great detail about the quarrel over the possession of some Churches in Egypt. See also: Bar Hebraeus, 1, p. 105.

<sup>12</sup> -H. Kennedy, 'The Melkite Church', p. 329; S. Griffith, 'Eutychius of Alexandria on the emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: a tenth century Christian apology in Arabic', pp. 155-156.

The contemporary sources, especially the Arab Christians offer some details in regard to the rare instances when the irregular ties between Byzantium and the eastern Church occurred was re-established. The alleged letter of the three Melkite patriarchs of the east to the emperor Theophilos dated circa 836,<sup>13</sup> notwithstanding the disputes between modern scholars on its authenticity<sup>14</sup> represents one such occasion of contact between the Byzantine church and eastern churches in Syria. Similarly, we have an alleged journey of Saint Theodore of Edessa to Constantinople, which Vasiliev has dated to somewhere between 850 and 856.<sup>15</sup>

Patriarch Photios had some correspondence with the eastern patriarchies. The first of his letters, addressed to Antioch's church, which Grumel dates around 860,<sup>16</sup> is a traditional letter of faith confession.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, this letter was sent to the Melkite clerics, since Photios speaks about "δύο ἐνέργειαι" of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The most important and reliable case, however, is that of the council of 869-870, in Constantinople,<sup>19</sup> which was attended by Thomas of Tyre, representing the

<sup>13</sup> - J. A. Munitiz et al. (eds.) *The letter of the three patriarchs to emperor Theophilos and related texts*, (Prophyrogenitus UK 1997).

<sup>14</sup> - See the discussion of A. Vasiliev, in which he doubts the authenticity of the letter: A. Vasiliev, 'The life of St. Theodore of Edessa', pp. 216-225. More important, Yaḥyā b. Sa'Id al-Anṭākī (*PO* 18, p. 710) confirms that there was no contact between the Melkite patriarchs in the East and the Byzantine Empire since the Umayyad period. Vasiliev did not use Yaḥyā's narrative in support of his argument against the authenticity of the alleged letter. The critical point of the letter is the number of the attendees' clerics, 185 bishops, 17 abbots, 1153 monks (p. 2) which would have been impossible to be accepted under the Muslim rule. However, J. Chrysotomides, in her defence of the authenticity of the letter, undermines it, she proves that some parts of the letter are certainly a later interpolation but she maintained her belief in the authenticity of the whole letter. See J. A. Munitiz et al., *The letter of the three patriarchs*, pp. XVII-XXXIII.

<sup>15</sup> - A. Vasiliev, 'The life of St. Theodore of Edessa', p. 189.

<sup>16</sup> - Grumel, *Les registres des actes*, no. 465.

<sup>17</sup> - Photios, *PG* 102, cols. 1017-1024.

<sup>18</sup> - Photios, *PG* 102, col. 1021B.

<sup>19</sup> - This council held in Constantinople to discuss the final stage of the Photian schism and the conflict of interest between Byzantium and Rome concerning the Bulgarian church. The council was attended by representatives from the Papacy, the Eastern Churches, and in the last session, a delegate from the Bulgarian Khan Boris I (852-889) arrived to take part. On this council, see Dovrnik, 'Rome and Constantinople in the ninth century', *ECQ* 3 (1939); idem: 'Les second schime de Photios', *B* 8 (1933) 425-474; N. Tobias, *Basil I, the founder of the Macedonian Dynasty: A study of the political and military of the Byzantine Empire in the ninth century*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. (Rutgers State University, 1970) pp. 448-455 (he focuses mainly on the personal role of the emperor); Munitiz et al., *The letter of the three Patriarchs to emperor Theophilos*, p. XX, note. 19.



Patriarch of Antioch.<sup>20</sup> We know that Photios had sent a letter to Thomas a few years before his mission; though the text is no longer available;<sup>21</sup> in 867 he sent an encyclical letter to the Patriarchs of the East seeking their support against the new *blaspheme* of the west (the Philioque).<sup>22</sup> It is presumed that Thomas (as representative of the Antioch church) would have had to obtain permission from the appropriate Muslim authorities in order to attend such a council in Byzantium, but we are have no information on this minor detail.

Hence the conflict was renewed between Photios and the papacy as he turned again to the East seeking support, in a council held in Constantinople in 879. He sent two letters to Theodosius I, patriarch of Antioch (870-890)<sup>23</sup> and Elias III (878-907), patriarch of Jerusalem, asking them to send representatives to the coming council.<sup>24</sup> In the second letter to the patriarch of Jerusalem he offers help for the church of the Holy Resurrection. Unfortunately, it is not clear what kind of help he offers, since the text is missing.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, the emperor Leo VI is known to have sent a special delegation to Baghdad, headed by Leo Choirosphaktes. It was designed for the primary purpose of exchanging prisoners of war, which was a common task performed by almost all the Byzantine and Muslim embassies. More important, however, is the ulterior motive of this mission, which was to obtain a special permission from the Muslim authorities. This would allow the eastern patriarchs of both Jerusalem and Antioch to cast their support behind the emperor in his quarrel with the church over the matter of his fourth

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<sup>20</sup> - Mansi, 16, col. 309.

<sup>21</sup> - Grumel, *Les registes des acts*, No. 471.

<sup>22</sup> - PG, 102, cols. 721-741; Grumel, *Les registes des acts*, no. 481

<sup>23</sup> - Grumel, *Les registes des acts*, no. 517. (Grumel points out that the text is missing).

<sup>24</sup> - Grumel, *Les registes des acts*, no. 518.

<sup>25</sup> - Grumel, *Les registes des acts*, no. 518.

marriage.<sup>26</sup> Around the same time, there is a letter from the patriarch Nicholas I, addressed to one of the eastern patriarchs.<sup>27</sup> The letter expresses deep spiritual support for the patriarchs in their “daily perils”, and refers to the fourth marriage of the emperor as “disgraceful”. However, there are no other details beyond the spiritual support and prayers from the patriarch.

An interesting article by Griffith examines various historical Byzantine events which are found in the historical work of the Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria, Eutychius. Griffith points out that Eutychius was completely unaware of several quite important events in Byzantium. He seems to have omitted several names of Byzantine emperors, while choosing instead to invent some others and he seems to be utterly confused concerning the iconoclasm controversy in Byzantium.<sup>28</sup> This immediately raises the question, ‘If the Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria was so unaware of several crucial events occurring in Constantinople, just a few decades before he was born,<sup>29</sup> can we still safely assume that a direct line of communication existed between Byzantium and the Melkite Arabs in the East?’

It is noteworthy that the Muslim authorities were always suspicious of any secret communications between their Christian subjects and any foreign Christian rulers; this included not only the Byzantine emperors, but also other rulers.<sup>30</sup> On some

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<sup>26</sup> -Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 4, p. 2277 (He did not mention the issue of the permission of the representatives of the eastern patriarchs); Vita Euthymii, pp. 85, 93, 107; G. Koliaş, *Léon Choerosphactès*, p. 90; Eutychius, Saʿīd b. Bātrīq, *Kitāb al-tārīkh*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>27</sup> -Nicholas I, *Letters*, no. 89, pp. 367-377; Grumel, *Les registes des actes*, no. 678.

<sup>28</sup> -S. Griffith, ‘Eutychius of Alexandria on the emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: a tenth century moment Christian apology in Arabic’ pp. 154-90, especially pp. 170-172.

<sup>29</sup> - Eutychius states that he was born in 254 H/ 868 AD. Eutychius, (Saʿīd b. al-Bātrīq) *Kitāb al-Tārīkh*, II, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> -See the narrative of the Egyptian patriarch Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, when the Umayyad governor of Egypt ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān was informed of the communication between the Egyptian Coptic church and the Abyssinian king, he became very furious and ordered the death of the patriarch. Severus b. al-Muqaffaʿ, *Tārīkh*, I: 2, pp. 131, 136, in which he relates that the Muslim ruler should be informed of any communications with foreigners (Note: all these events, though they occurred in the Umayyad are typical of also in the ‘Abbasid era); A similar narrative appeared the life of the Coptic patriarch Isaac (692-700). See Mena of Nikiou, *The life of Isaac of Alexandria, the*

occasions they were known to have ordered the Christians not to accommodate any foreigners in their homes, churches and monasteries, without first notifying the Muslim emir.<sup>31</sup> It seems, however, that the accusation of contacting the Byzantine emperors was a ready-made excuse, which could easily be employed by any fanatical Muslim ruler or group, as well as non-Chalcedonian Christians against the Melkite clergy.<sup>32</sup>

Byzantine advances during the second half of tenth century enabled them to bring under their dominion several cities scattered throughout northern Syria, along with their Christian populations. When Antioch fell under Byzantine control in October 969, the Eastern Patriarchate of Antioch once again found itself part of the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine emperor Nikephoros Phokas, as soon as opportunity would allow, appointed a Byzantine patriarch over the city, which occurred after the death of the patriarch Christopher (960-969).<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, very little is known about the life of the Christian Arabs under the re-established rule of Byzantium, as contemporary sources were often silent about it. However, we have a narrative dated in the reign of the emperor Basil II, which may shed some light on such an unclear topic. The story concerns a quarrel which erupted between the patriarch of Antioch and Byzantium. We have two sources for this event, both of which are from Christian Arabs. One is a Chalcedonian, while the other is a Coptic non-Chalcedonian. The first account is recorded by Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, the Melkite writer, who emigrated to Antioch only a few years after these events

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*martyrdom of Saint Macrobios*, trans. N. D. Bell, Cistercian Publications (Kalamazoo 1988) pp. 72-74.

<sup>31</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, p. 151.

<sup>32</sup> - C.f. for example Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, pp. 809-810; Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, p. 298.

<sup>33</sup> -Ibraim ibn Yuhanna, 'Vie du patriarche mlekite d'Antioche Christophore', *POC* 2 (1952) fasc. IV, P. 358.

occurred.<sup>34</sup> The other is by an Egyptian named Michael, bishop of Tanīs<sup>35</sup> who was visiting the city around the time which these events were supposed to have taken place.<sup>36</sup>

First, we find that the accounts give completely different names for the patriarch of Antioch. However, it seems on the face of it, they are referring to the same person. While Yaḥyā calls him Agapius, the Egyptian bishop names him John, and both call him patriarch of Antioch. Soon, however, we discover they are referring to two different individuals. The Egyptian writer seems to be writing about the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch, John VIII (1003-1029), and ignores the other Chalcedonian patriarch. He relates how a Chalcedonian bishop, consumed by jealousy of the Jacobite patriarch John, deviously conspired against him, and maliciously reported to the emperor about a supposed *heretic* Jacobite, that he allegedly did not consider himself a loyal subject of the emperor, but instead wrote soliciting the attention and support of other kings.<sup>37</sup>

We are subsequently told that the Jacobite patriarch was brought to Constantinople, where he faced religious bitter debates with several clerics, and he was later condemned to live the remainder of his life in prison.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, he left a will behind in which he strongly advised his followers not to live under the Byzantine rule, but to emigrate to Āmid or Edessa, which were under Muslim rule.<sup>39</sup>

Finally the Egyptian writer in his account compares the persecution and suffering of the Christians living in Egypt, who were living under the rule of al-

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<sup>34</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, P. 708.

<sup>35</sup> - A city on the north east of the Nile delta, near Demiatta, now destroyed.

<sup>36</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh* II: 2, p. 142.

<sup>37</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II: 2, p. 142. (He meant by the other kings, kings of Abyssina and Nubia who were following the non-Chalcedonian doctrine)

<sup>38</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II: 2, p. 146.

<sup>39</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II, 2, p. 146.

Hākim, to those who were living in north Syria, and were under Byzantine rule and suffering the Byzantine persecution.<sup>40</sup>

As regards Yaḥyā's story, it relates to the misunderstanding and lack of trust which existed between the emperor and the Arab (Melkite) patriarch of Antioch Agapius I (978-996), whom the emperor accused of supporting the rebel Bardas Phokas.<sup>41</sup>

### Byzantine intervention on behalf of the Arab Christians

We have only fragments from Arabic (Muslim and Christian) sources about the situation of the Arab Christians between Muslims and Byzantines. Some early stories go back to the Umayyad era.<sup>42</sup>

The only explicit example occurred in 966 / 355H. The Muslim governor of Jerusalem and the population of the city had attacked the Christian sacred places in the city and killed John VII (964-966), the patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>43</sup> The Egyptian

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<sup>40</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II: 2, p. 147.

<sup>41</sup> - Yaḥyā narrates that after the defeat of Bardas Phokas a letter was found in his belongings from the patriarch supporting the rebel in something he intended to do (without revealing what it was), so the emperor had assumed that he, i.e., the patriarch had supported the rebel in his action. Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 428.

<sup>42</sup> - Ibn al-Jawzī narrates that Mu'āwiyah 1 (661-680AD./ 41-60H.) in his later years suffered from insomnia, and the sound of the church' bells kept him awake. So he thought to trick the Byzantine emperor (sic) and get rid of these disturbing bells. He asked for a volunteer who would risk his life in return for a huge reward, a large part of which would be paid in advance. The deadly task was to be sent to Constantinople as ambassador and make *Adhān* (Muslim call to prayer), inside the Byzantine court in the presence of the emperor and all his retinue, who would hasten to kill that Muslim. In retaliation Mu'āwiyah would be able to kill anyone who try to ring church' bells in his empire. The Byzantine emperor, however, realised the trick and hardly prevented his men from killing Muslim man and sent him back to Mu'āwiyah. The story seems to be fictitious, since we know clearly that one of the earliest conditions between Muslim rulers and their Christian subjects was not to ring the church' bells, let alone doing that so midnight!. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Akhbār al-adhkiyā'* (Stories of the intelligent) ed. M. M. al-khūlī, p. 113. The same story is narrated by Ibn Qutaybah, with some differences, in which he indicates that the bells are those of the Byzantine churches! See Ibn Qutaybah, *'Uūn al-akhbār*, 1, p. 198; Ibn Rustah narrates a similar story but with different names and puts it around 717(Arab siege of Constantinople); he says that the Muslim volunteered to go Constantinople and told the emperor if he was killed, every church in Islam would be destroyed, Ibn Rustah, p. 193.

<sup>43</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, deals with these events in detail and mentions that the Jews also took part in these violations. Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, pp. 798-808.

emir Kāfūr<sup>44</sup> consequently tried to pacify the emperor Nikephoros and offered to rebuild the Church, but the latter threatened that he would rebuild it by the sword.<sup>45</sup>

The Byzantine Empire was not the only Christian state to intervene on behalf of the Christian Arabs under the Muslim rule: there were others, for example, the Nubian and Abyssinian kingdoms, whose Christian churches were subordinate to, and fell under the authority and control of the patriarch of Egyptian Coptic Church.<sup>46</sup>

However, we have only a few examples where Muslim authorities using the status of their Christian subjects in the context of the relations with Byzantium.

Al-Tanūkhī, the tenth century Muslim writer states that, the active vizier 'Alī b. 'Isa<sup>47</sup> tried to save the Muslim prisoners of war in Byzantium by using the Christian Arabs as bargaining counters. The vizier told one of his companions:

Our commissioner at the frontier has written to the effect that the Moslem prisoners in Byzantium territory were well treated till recently. Now the throne is occupied by two lads,<sup>48</sup> who have been oppressing the prisoners, starving them, leaving them naked, torturing them and demanding that they should turn Christian. They are in the sorest straits."<sup>49</sup>

The vizier's friend advised him as follows:

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<sup>44</sup> -A black slave eunuch, d. 968 /357h, was a page in the 'Ikhshīd family who governed Egypt (935-969), and he became the governor of Egypt after the death of his master Muḥammed b. Ṭughuj in 945 /334H. See Ibn Miskawayh, *Kitāb tajārib al-umam*, 6, p. 110. Al-Dhahabī, pp. 149-152. See A.M. Shaban, *Islamic history*, II, pp. 196-197.

<sup>45</sup> - Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, pp. 184-186.

<sup>47</sup> - 'Alī b. 'Isa a prominent 'Abbasid vizier, held the vizierate twice (301-304.H./ 913-914 A. D.) and (315-316 H./ 926-929AD.). He was one of the well-respected and pious men in the Abbasid caliphate, and unlike most of the viziers in his time; he was not killed or tonsured upon his removal of his office. The Muslim contemporary writers devoted several pages to praise him and his characters. See al-Ṣābi', *Tuhfut al-'amra' fī tārikh al-wuzarā'* (history of the viziers), (Beirut, 1904) pp.281-317; al-Ḥamadānī, *Takmilat tarīkh al-Ṭabarī*, pp. 12-13. For an intensive study on 'Alī b. 'Isā, see H. Bowen, *'Alī b. 'Isa and his times* (Cambridge 1928)

<sup>48</sup> -Jenkins points out convincingly that the Muslim writer means by the two young emperors Constantine VII and his uncle Alexander who was over forty, but, most of the Arabic and Byzantine sources indicate that he looked much younger. C.f. R. J. H Jenkins, 'The emperor Alexander and the Saracen prisoners', p. 391.

<sup>49</sup> -Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥādarah*, p. 30 (The Arabic text) p. 32 (English trans.).

The Christians have a potentate in Antioch who is called Patriarch, and another in Jerusalem called Catholicos.<sup>50</sup> The authority of these two extends over the whole Byzantine Empire, so that at times they have excommunicated the emperor himself or released him from excommunication, and these sentences have been recognised. The Byzantines hold that disobedience to these two potentates is heresy, and that no Emperor can be properly installed in the Byzantine capital without their approval, without his paying homage to them and being promoted by them. Now the two cities (Jerusalem and Antioch) are within our empire and these persons are under our protection. The vizier should write to the governors of the cities to summon them and inform them of the treatment accorded to the captives, which is contrary to their doctrines, and that if this does not stop them (the Patriarchs and Catholicos) will be held responsible.<sup>51</sup>

This story appears to be authentic, as the Byzantine reply, the letter of patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos still exists.<sup>52</sup> The only point which could strain the creditability of the text is a quotation attributed to the vizier, in its phrasing:

“This is not a matter with which I can deal, for it is not within the competence of our Sultan nor the caliph”.<sup>53</sup>

The word, *Sultan*, evidently puzzled the original translator. It seems that the original writer was confused and meant the Daylamite Būyids, who gained the power in Baghdad a few years later, (945 AD/ 334H.). Equally it could be a metaphor, as several Arabic sources use this word in any general reference to the ruling authority.<sup>54</sup>

This narrative, however, if it is to be trusted, bears a special significance in several important ways. One factor seems clear, at least on the surface; this advice for the

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<sup>50</sup> - This was the title of the head of the Syrian church in Baghdad, who bears this title under the caliph authority.

<sup>51</sup> - Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥādarah*, pp. 30-31, English trans pp. 32-33.

<sup>52</sup> - Nicholas I, *Letters*, pp. 373-381.

<sup>53</sup> - Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥādarah*, p. 30, English trans p. 32.

<sup>54</sup> - See for example al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2, p. 622.

vizier appears to be an unprecedented example in Muslim policy towards their Christian subjects. However, I shall return to this story later.

Another narrative refers to the patriarchs of the East, who had been allowed to send a representative to a council, which was held in Constantinople in 869. This account tells of a message, which was allegedly passed from the Muslim emir to the Byzantine emperor via the patriarch of Constantinople, in which he requested the release of some Muslim prisoners.<sup>55</sup> However, the text itself does not clearly support the view that Muslim rulers made it part of their normal policy to use the status of their Christian subjects to gain some advantage in their relations with the Byzantine empire.

In the text the patriarchs beg the Byzantine patriarch to persuade the emperor to send back as many Muslim prisoners of war as possible, which “will soften the anger of those (Muslims) who rule us”.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately we do not know exactly what kind of previous negotiations or terms were arranged by the Muslim authorities in return for allowing these clerics to travel to Constantinople and guaranteeing their safe passage.

However, there are two facts which should be borne in mind. First, around the time of 869/870 AD, there was a mounting feeling of aggression among many in the Muslim community towards the Christians in general, especially following the killing of ‘Umar of Melitene and his fellow Muslim, ‘Alī the Armenian.<sup>57</sup> Muslims considered them to be martyrs.<sup>58</sup> Second, the severe and brutal, treatment of Muslim

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<sup>55</sup> -Mansi, 16, cols. 13/14; c.f. J. A. Munitiz et al., *The letter of the three patriarchs to the emperor Theophilos*, p. XX, note, 19.

<sup>56</sup> - Mansi, 16, cols. 13 E.

<sup>57</sup> -Bar Hebraeus, 1, p. 146; On these battles, see Genesios, *Regum libri quattuor*, pp. 67-69, English trans. A. Kaldellis, pp. 84-86 (who called the place Porson); Theophanes Cont., pp. 179-183. George Mon. cont., 825; Bar Hebraeus, I., p. 145. G. Huxley, ‘Michael III and the battle of Bishop’s meadow (A. D. 863)’, *GRBS* 16 (1975) pp. 269-273.

<sup>58</sup> - Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 4, p. 198.



prisoners of war in the expeditions of Basil I,<sup>59</sup> had repercussions in Muslim lands, and raised the urgent need to release some of these Muslim prisoners of war. These factors may play a hidden part in the negotiations to allow the Christian clerics to pass safely to the *dar al-Ḥarb* (enemy land).

Likewise, there is a story of a letter attributed to the Egyptian governor Muḥammad b. al-Ikhshīd, sent to the Byzantine emperor Romanus Lecapenus. The emperor replied that he was not in the habit of corresponding with local governors and minor officials, but only with the caliph. Al-Ikhshīd simply and firmly reminded the emperor that he had control over the three great Christian Patriarchies in the East.<sup>60</sup> This would seem convincingly assure an emperor that he was dealing with a Muslim of equal status. Yet the emir did not threaten or esteem himself too highly by saying “if you considered the whole issue as it deserves, you will realise that God has singled us out with the best kingdoms, and the honour of special lands which are honoured in this world and in the after life”.<sup>61</sup>

Later in 947AD./ 336 H., the Faṭimid governor of Sicily, upon establishing a new mosque in a recently acquired Muslim foothold along the Italian coast, threatened that if “one stone of this mosque is destroyed all the churches in Sicily and Africa will be destroyed”.<sup>62</sup>

In conclusion, one can assume that there was no systematic or regular policy, whereby Muslim authorities were known to have used the status of the Christians under their rule, as a bargaining counter in their relations with Byzantium. All we have are a few isolated cases in which this might have been used as a tool to work to

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<sup>59</sup> - John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, pp. 154-155 (German trans. J. Thurn, p. 190; Genesios, *Regum libri quattuor*, p. 84 (English trans. A. Kaldellis, p. 105); Theophanes Cont. pp. 283, 300.

<sup>60</sup> -Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 7, pp.10-18, especially p. 14. French trans. See M. Canard, ‘Une lettre de Muḥammad ibn Tuġj à l’empereur Romain Lécapène’, no 7 in idem, *Byzance et les musulmans*, French translation of the text, pp. 195-205, esp. p. 200.

<sup>61</sup> - Ibid.

their advantage. We see on several examples of Muslim mobs storming various Christian churches and houses and killing numbers of Christians. This was largely in reaction to the various events which were taking place on the battlefields between the Byzantine and Muslim armies. It seems safe, however, to presume that no systematic Muslim policy, even in the reign of al-Ḥākim, was explicitly formed or enforced linking the purposeful persecution or maltreatment of Christians living under their rule to the war that raged between Byzantium and Muslims.

#### **Arab Christians as ambassadors to Byzantium.**

The Melkite clerics played an important part as emissaries between Byzantines and Muslims, although such diplomatic missions scarcely ever took place in the 'Abbasid era. We do, however, have some rare examples of it.<sup>63</sup> We have seen that the representatives of the Eastern Patriarchs attending the council of 969/970 in Constantinople had to obtain permission in order to go *dar al-ḥarb*, viz. into Byzantine lands, and this of itself carried a message to the emperor to release some Muslim prisoners.<sup>64</sup>

Locally, in 967 AD. /365H. the Ḥamdanid family in Aleppo employed the services of a local Christian man called Milkun al-Sirāni as an ambassador to the emperor Basil II.<sup>65</sup> This seems to have been a matter of facilitating the communication with the emperor, or, as one would assume, to act as an interpreter and liaison on behalf of both parties.

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<sup>62</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 328.

<sup>63</sup> - For example the mission sent by the vizier 'Ali b. Isā, which had some Christian members among the delegation, and they received special treatment from the Byzantine authorities. Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muhādarah*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>64</sup> - Mansi, 16, cols. 13/14; c.f., J. A. Munitiz et al., *The letter of the three patriarchs to the emperor Theophilos*, p. XX, note, 19.

<sup>65</sup> - Ibn Taghrī Bardī, 4, p. 118.

The Faṭimid rulers in Egypt, who were generally more tolerant towards both Christians and Jews,<sup>66</sup> established the practice of using the Melkite patriarchs in their diplomatic missions to Byzantium. The Arabic sources give us only a few details surrounding these diplomatic missions, which often involved Eastern patriarchs being sent to Constantinople. In 1000AD/ 390H. the patriarch of Jerusalem, Orestes (986-1006) was sent to Constantinople by the order of caliph al Ḥākīm, with fully authorisation to act on behalf of the Caliph in his negotiations with the Byzantines.<sup>67</sup> It is interesting to note that Orestes spent four years in Constantinople, during which time he could have developed close contacts with the clergy there.<sup>68</sup>

Once again, in 1024AD/ 414 H. the Faṭimid lady Sitt al-Mulk, who was the powerful sister of al-Ḥākīm and the regent for his son al-Zāhir, sent Nikephoros I (1020- 1048), the patriarch of Jerusalem as envoy to negotiate the restoration of the relationship between the Faṭimids and Byzantines.<sup>69</sup> In this mission, the Egyptian patriarch would certainly have had a good chance to meet the Byzantine clerics, but no clear details about this event are survive.

Actually there is little evidence to suggest that any of these Arab Christians gained any advantage whatsoever, in exchange for offering their services as diplomats or ambassadors. Yet, Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī casually alludes to the fact that Faṭimid rulers were quite considerate in their treatment of their Melkite subjects, in that they granted them special privileges on a number of occasions. Further, they were known to have confiscated some of the Coptic Churches and allocated them to the Melkites, their rivals to use. One may argue, however, that this policy depended mainly on the

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<sup>66</sup> -See an intensive study by S. Maḥmūd on the Fatimids and their policy towards their non-Muslim subjects. S. Maḥmūd, *ahl-al-Dhimmah fī Miṣr fī al-'aṣr al-fāṭimī al-'awwal* (The non-Muslims in Egypt in the first Fatimid period) (Cairo 1995).

<sup>67</sup> -Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 461.

<sup>68</sup> -Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 461.

personal influence of Faṭimid lady Sitt al-Mulk, whose mother was a Melkite. It may be safely assumed that this would have given the Melkites an advantage, or at least more prestige and importance.

### **Byzantium and Christian Arabs: Old hostility or new brotherhood?**

In the history of Byzantine-Muslim relations the relationship between the local Christian Arabs and Byzantium has always been somewhat obscure, there is little evidence concerning the nature and extent of these relations after the Muslim invasions in the seventh century.

Undoubtedly, the lives of Christian Arabs were dramatically affected by the course of events and the struggle between Byzantines and Muslims. Where the Muslim-Byzantine war was concerned, the Muslim community was always suspicious of local Christians and the war offered ready-made opportunities to accuse them of being sympathetic or co-operative with their enemies, viz. Byzantium. In some cases these accusations had a solid basis in a real co-operation which did exist between Byzantium and Christian Arabs.

In 969 AD/ 358 H. the Byzantine emperor John I Tzimiskes, upon his victories over the Muslims in Syria, was able to elicit a certain degree of co-operation from the local Christian population of *Boqa*, near Antioch. Later, when the emperor formed a blockade around Antioch, some citizens of the Christian Arab quarter of the town betrayed the Muslims within the city. They allowed the Byzantine army to enter the city through their district.<sup>70</sup> It is curious that the Byzantine sources have omitted the

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<sup>69</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 415.

<sup>70</sup> - Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 94. Ibn al-Aṭhīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, pp. 36-38; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 172.

highly important part that the local Christian Arabs played in providing help for the Byzantines.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, in 900AD/ 287H. Bar Hebraeus narrates that the Byzantine army, upon devastating Kisūm, “took with them to the country of RHÔMÂÊ (Byantium), the greater number of the Christians with a forceful hand, saying, lest the Arabs should come and kill them”.<sup>72</sup> This quote indicates the continuity of the Byzantine policy to move or resettle some of the Arab people who were already Christian, into areas under Byzantine control. And the Byzantine claims, if this narrative is to be trusted, suggest that some kind of co-operation was going on between Byzantium and the Christian Arabs. Likewise, the Armenians were afraid of becoming a target of the Arabs’ revenge, in possible retaliation against their co-operation with the Byzantine army.<sup>73</sup>

### **Effects of Byzantine-Muslim struggle on the Christians under Muslim rule**

The news of the Byzantine victories over the Muslims certainly deepened the sorrow and bitterness felt in many Muslim hearts. As a consequence, these feelings often led some members of the Arab community (mobs or leaders) to treat local Christians harshly.

In 853AD/ 238 H. a Byzantine fleet sacked Damietta, in a sudden naval raid, which lasted for some days.<sup>74</sup> The immediate Muslim reaction to this raid was to focus on building a new naval fleet in the eastern Mediterranean. To pursue a discussion of this topic would take us too far afield from the purpose of this study.

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<sup>71</sup> -Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, pp. 82-83 (German trans. F. Loretto, pp. 79- 80); Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 822-823. Some other Muslim sources also omit this co-operation, see al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, p. 44.

<sup>72</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 154.

<sup>73</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 169.

<sup>74</sup> -Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 3, pp. 1417-1418; al-Kindī, *Kitāb ‘Umarā’ Miṣr*, (*The Governors and judges of Egypt*), p. 201. On this raid, see E. Eickhoff, *Seekrieg und Seepolitik zwischen Islam und Abendland*, (Berlin 1966) pp. 201-202; 284 - 286.

What is more germane here are the repercussions of this raid on the Egyptian Christians, who according to a Christian Arab historian, experienced rather severe and harsh treatment, in reprisal. He continues relating how these miserable people were maltreated, and how they were then forced to build new ships to replace those which have been destroyed by the Byzantines.<sup>75</sup>

We are told that the local Christians, after undergoing much harsh treatment at the hands of the governor of Egypt finally complained to the caliph (al-Mutawakkil), who responded by deposing the acting governor 'Anbasah b. 'Ishāq. He appointed another emir who treated the Christians more fairly.<sup>76</sup> As for the caliph himself and his reaction to his raid, it is known that his anti-Christian decree was issued in 946AD./ 235 H. a short while before this raid.<sup>77</sup> But al-Ṭabarī narrates that in the next year (of this raid), 854AD/ 239 H. the anti-Christian policy was tightened, and a year later, upon a revolution in Ḥims, the caliph ordered the destruction of the city's churches and monasteries. The local Christians in the city were not the main agent in the revolution; they only supported Muslims in their revolution.<sup>78</sup> However, it seems that the reaction and punishment of the caliph were overwhelming.

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<sup>75</sup> -Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II: I, pp, 13 -15. It is noteworthy that some Muslim historians, like al-Kindī omit such news of the angry reaction of the Muslim governor and the consequences of the Byzantine raid against Damietta for the conditions of the local Christians, see W. B Kubiak 'The Byzantine raids on Damietta in 853 and the Egyptian navy in the 9th century', *B* 40 (1970) 45- 66.

<sup>76</sup> - Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II: I, pp. 13 -15. See W. B. Kubiak, 'The Byzantine raids on Damietta in 853 and the Egyptian navy in the 9th century' *B* 40 (1970) pp. 45- 66.

<sup>77</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī narrates that the caliph issued a decree against al-dhimmah (the non-Muslim Christians and Jews), forcing them to wear different clothes, as well as their women and slaves (who should not be Muslims at all) and destroying all the newly built churches and monasteries. Furthermore, he had their house doors marked by a sign of evil, in order to distinguish from the houses of Muslims; also, he ordered the same for their tombs to be distinguish from the Muslim ones. As for the government offices, which are usually run by Christians, the caliph forbade employment of any non-Muslim in this work. The caliph also forbade teaching the non-Muslim children in the same *Katā'ib* (children's primary schools, mostly private and individual, for teaching the Arabic language and Qur'ān). Finally this decree was sent to all the Muslim provinces in his caliphate with emphatic orders to apply it. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III; 3, p. 1389-1390, the text of the decree, pp. 1390-1394. The repercussion of this decree appears in a Byzantine hagiographic text, the vita Constantine, apostle of the Slavs, see Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts of our blessed teacher*, p. 55.

<sup>78</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 3, p. 1422.

A few years later, the news of the killing in 869AD/ 255H. of 'Umar, emir of Melitene and 'Ali the Armenian, the other Muslim emir, reached Baghdad. The mob in the city quickly gathered, assaulted and robbed several official buildings, setting free some prisoners and "looted two monasteries of the Christians, viz. that of BESHAR and that of ABRAHAM, the sons of 'Ahron", before the Turkish slaves finally managed to gain control of the situation and stopped the looting.<sup>79</sup>

Again, in 884 AD./ 271H the mob gathered near Baghdad and attacked an old monastery there, partially destroying it, but the authorities managed to prevent its total destruction and rebuilt it. In the following year the mob finally managed to completely destroy it.<sup>80</sup>

In 920AD./ 308H. the Muslim mob gathered in the streets of Baghdad. They managed in their fury to open the gates of the prisons, and attacked many of the wealthy Christians there. The authorities were not very effective in stopping them, however, but executed some of those it managed to catch.<sup>81</sup> These events could have been driven by the emperor's refusal to exchange the prisoners.<sup>82</sup> Again, in 923AD/ 310, the Muslim rioters burnt the church of St. Mary.<sup>83</sup> The riots continued not only in Baghdad but also in other parts of the Muslim lands. In 961AD./ 350H. when the news of the Byzantine recapture of Crete reached Cairo, the mob gathered in large numbers and attacked the Melkite churches in Cairo. They destroyed them completely, before moving on to sack the other churches in the city.<sup>84</sup>

In 966 AD. /356 H. when the Khurāsānite volunteers returned to Aleppo with Sayf al-Dawlah with their large elephant which later died. Soon after its death the

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<sup>79</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 3, pp. 1510-1513; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 146.

<sup>80</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 4, pp. 2107-8; Ibn al-Aṭhīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 59; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 149.

<sup>81</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, pp. 157-158.

<sup>82</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 157.

<sup>83</sup> - H. Kennedy, 'The Melkite Church', p. 331.

<sup>84</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, pp. 782-783.

Muslims began to accuse the local Christians of being responsible for their misfortune, by poisoning the elephant.<sup>85</sup>

In 966AD./ 355H Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl the governor of Jerusalem and its Muslim people attacked the Christian sacred places in the city and killed John VII (964-966) the patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>86</sup> Yaḥyā blames the emir personally and does not allude to Byzantium in this narrative, but the events in northern Syria, one may assume, had a definite influence on this incident and others against Christians.

It seems that the successive Byzantine victories in Syria deepened the *mala fide* in Muslim hearts against their Christians subjects. Thus, when the Faṭimid fleet was burnt in Cairo in 996AD./ 386H., suspicion at first fell on several Greek merchants in the city, but swiftly Muslim attention and anger was diverted to the Melkite churches in Cairo.<sup>87</sup>

In 967 / 356 H., three Arab emirs in Antioch plotted to kill Christopher, the Chalcedonian patriarch of the city; later they issued orders to plunder the churches of the city as well as the house of the patriarch.<sup>88</sup> This action may probably be seen as personally motivated, but all the events of the story were driven by the course of the events surrounding Byzantine-Muslim warfare. The patriarch was subsequently accused of plotting to surrender the city into Byzantine hands. The decision of

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<sup>85</sup> - Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> -Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī deals with these events in details, and mentions that the Jews had also taken part in these violations against the Christians. Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, pp. 798-808; (ed. L. Cheikho) pp. 124-125.

<sup>87</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 447; al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, I, p. 290. See also. W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp. 250-251.

<sup>88</sup> -More details are in the vita of this patriarch, see Habib Zayyat, 'La vie du Patriarche Melkite Christophre (d. 967) par le protospathaire Ibrahim b. Yūhanna, Document Inédit du Xe siècle', *POC* 2 (1952) 11-38, 333- 366.Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, pp. 809-810; (ed. L. Cheikho) pp. 128-129; Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, p. 100<sub>15-18</sub> (German trans. F. Loretto, p. 94); Bar Heabraeus, I, p. 171 (he puts this event in 357 H. but the narrative of al-Antāki is more reliable. Ibn al-'Adīm does not mention such a narrative. Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 90-94. See H. Kennedy, 'The Melkite church', pp. 335-336.



execution was taken according to *Fatwa*,<sup>89</sup> and was carried out by some Khurasānite volunteers.

Once again in 1001 AD/ 392 H. the mob in Baghdad had plundered and burnt the houses of the Christians.<sup>90</sup> A few years later, the mob attacked a Christian funeral and the authorities hardly managed to control the situation before a few Muslims and Christians were killed in the melee.<sup>91</sup>

From these different accounts of events, which fall within different periods of time and involve different people and places, one can safely assume that most of these violent actions carried out by angry Muslim mobs were primarily provoked by bad news received from the battle front of the continuing war between Byzantines and Muslims. This immediate reaction was expressed in waves of attacks against the Arab Christians. The authorities in most cases tried very hard to protect their Christian subjects from becoming victims of this sort of action.

### **The problem of al-Ḥākim and Byzantine reaction**

The reign of al-Ḥākim (996-1021AD/ 386-411H.)<sup>92</sup> represents one of the strangest periods of all Islamic history. He himself was one of the most atypical rulers and there are only a few comparable rulers in human history. He has been labelled as ruthless, merciless, and at the same time being extremely capricious.<sup>93</sup> In a word, his

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<sup>89</sup> -Ibrāhīm b. Yūhanna, the hagiographer, did not blame the Muslim qāḍī (judge) who issued this judgement on the ground that he ordered his fatwa as a general judgement against whomever surrendered the city and co-operated with the enemy. Ibrāhīm b. Yūhanna, 'La vie du Patriarche Melkite Christophre', *POC* 2 (1952) Fasc. 4, p. 342.

<sup>90</sup> - Hilāl al-Ṣabi', *Tārīkh*, p. 443; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 183.

<sup>91</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 185.

<sup>92</sup> -The reign of al-Ḥākim has been studied in detail by several scholars, see P. J. Vatikiotis, 'Al-Ḥākim bi Amrillah: the god-king idea realised' *Islamic culture* 29 (1955) pp. 1-8; in which he tries to rationalise the extreme caprice of the caliph; M. 'Inān, *al-Ḥākim bi Amrillah wa asrār al-da'wah al-fātimiah* (al-Ḥākim bi Amrillah and the secrets of the Fatimid propaganda), (Cairo 1937) (in Arabic); On al-Ḥākim and Byzantium, see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp.264-273;

<sup>93</sup> -Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, pp. 48-60; Ibn Aybak, *al-durah al-muḍyah*, pp. 257-260. The Egyptian historian, al-Maqrīzī, narrates several stories about the ruthless policy of al-Ḥākim, his unstable mentality and his sudden change towards all the court men, and towards all Muslims, Christians and

reign reflects one of the bitterest periods of persecution for Christians and Jews, as well as for Muslims in Egypt, who suffered severely under his unrelentingly harsh rule. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to study this period in detail; but one should consider the impact of his rule on Byzantine-Muslim relations.<sup>94</sup>

The maltreatment of Christians reached a climax in 1007AD./ 398H. when al-Ḥākim ordered the destruction of the sacred Christian places in Palestine as well as the removing of any ruins which remain there.<sup>95</sup> Again in 1012 AD./ 403 H. a series of decrees was issued against the Christians to force them to wear al-ghyār.<sup>96</sup>

In a unique text by al-Maqrīzī “He (al-Ḥākim) ordered all Churches and monasteries in his kingdom to be destroyed but he was informed that the Christian kings will destroy Muslim mosques in their lands, so he stopped”<sup>97</sup> Even so, some of these churches were destroyed later, and many of the sites and buildings were confiscated and donated to his men;<sup>98</sup> this text draws a clear connection between what was happening in regard to Christian sacred places in Muslim territory, and Muslim mosques located in Christian lands. Unfortunately, it is not clear which mosques are being referred to in this text; the mosque in Constantinople, other mosques which were located in newly occupied lands in northern Syria, like Antioch, or the Muslim mosques in Abyssina and Nubia, whose kings were under the spiritual leadership of the Egyptian Coptic church.

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Jews at the same time. See also the narrative of Christian writers. Severus b. al-Muqaffā', *Tārīkh*, II: 2, pp.113-137; Yaḥyā, (ed. L Cheikho) p. 219 (in which he tried to explain the mental illness of al-Ḥākim)

<sup>94</sup> - On the Byzantine-Muslim relations during the reign of al-Ḥākim, see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp. 253-273.

<sup>95</sup> - Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, II, p. 75; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 184; Matthew of Edessa, p. 42 (whose narrative speaks of Muslim attacks against Christians at the Church of the Resurrection, and the slaughtering of ten thousand Christians there.

<sup>96</sup> -Al-ghyār is an Arabic word, literally meaning (different) but used during Islamic history to describe what the Christians and Jews must wear in public, to distinguish them from the Muslims.

<sup>97</sup> - Al- Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, p. 75.

<sup>98</sup> -Al- Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, pp. 94-95.

In 1000 AD./ 390H. the capricious caliph ordered the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria whom he had previously appointed, to be killed,. However, this seems to have been a part of his harsh treatment of the Christians, regardless of their sect.<sup>99</sup>

In 1013 AD./ 404 H, in one of his sudden and unpredictable caprices, al-Ḥākim allowed some of the Christians and Jews in his realm to emigrate to Byzantine lands.<sup>100</sup> Among them was Yāḥyā al-Anṭākī who settled in Antioch.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately it is not clear, even from Yāḥyā's narrative, whether these emigrants obtained previous permission or made arrangements with the Byzantine authorities.

Equally, it might reflect one of al-Ḥākim's more tolerant periods, in which he behaved in a more just and merciful manner.<sup>102</sup> Or, it may be that it was a desperate attempt by these aggrieved people to find refuge in other Christians controlled lands, far away from the intolerant rule of al-Ḥākim, without pre-planning or permissions from the Byzantine authorities in Syria.

Notwithstanding al-Ḥākim's harsh policy towards Christians, he seems to have maintained good relations with the Byzantine Empire. In 1012-1013 AD./ 403 H he sent a very extravagant gift in the form of 7000 thousand Dinars to the Byzantine emperor,<sup>103</sup> and in the next year, he sent an envoy, who also bore a splendid gift for

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<sup>99</sup> -J. H. Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab chronicle*, I, p. 215. It is noteworthy that al-Maqrīzī, the main historian of the Fatimids omits this event, and so other sources, such Ibn al-Athīr, also Bar Hebraeus.

<sup>100</sup> - Al- Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, p. 100; Yāḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 519.

<sup>101</sup> -Yāḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 708 (ed. L. Cheikho) p. 92.

<sup>102</sup> -See for example in 1007AD./ 397 H al-Ḥākim's Christian doctor Ibn Niṣṭās died, and his funeral procession passed through the streets of Cairo. While most Muslim men of importance took part of it, such display of respect would ordinarily not have been possible or acceptable under the rule of any other Muslim caliph. And later in 1007AD./ 298 H, he showed a great deal of generosity towards his newly acquired Jewish doctor Saqr. However, it would be a misjudgement to consider this act a benevolent display of tolerance; it is rather another sign of his contradictory behaviour. Al- Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, p. 70, 73.

<sup>103</sup> - Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, p. 77

the emperor.<sup>104</sup> Later a Byzantine envoy arrived in Cairo in 1014-1015AD/ 405 H., where he was lavishly received with a military parade in the streets of Cairo.<sup>105</sup>

One can assume that his reign was a time of terror for all Egyptians. Indeed the whole nation was panic-stricken even; "a general edict had to be read in all mosques to pacify the mass and calm them, because there was great fear amongst them because of the commands of the king".<sup>106</sup>

As for Byzantium, it seems that both rulers, Byzantine and Muslim, had put aside question of religious controversy over the fate of the local Christians in Egypt.<sup>107</sup> Both were relatively keen to maintain good relations. Basil II, as Farag, states convincingly, "Unlike Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes, Basil II, was not possessed by any religious enthusiasm to fight the Muslims".<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, unlike the previous Byzantine policy of accepting (if not encouraging) Muslim political refugees, the Byzantine governor of Antioch refused to allow into his city Muslims who had escaped from al-Ḥākim until he obtained the permission of the emperor himself.<sup>109</sup>

### **Treatment of the civilian population**

Byzantine advances in the tenth century imposed a new phase in Byzantine-Muslim relations. It was the first time since the seventh century that Byzantine armies had penetrated into Muslim Syria, and occupied its cities. Subsequently large numbers of Muslims came under Byzantine rule.

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<sup>104</sup> - Al Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, p. 101.

<sup>105</sup> - Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, p. 107-108.

<sup>106</sup> - Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, II, p. 77.

<sup>107</sup> -On Byzantine-Muslim relations at this period, see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp. 253-281, esp. p. 272, in which he argued convincingly, that the harsh policy of al-Ḥākim did less harm than expected to Muslim-Byzantine relations at his time

<sup>108</sup> -W. Farag, 'Basil II the Bulgar Slayer (976-1025): the factors which determined the policies of his reign', *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts: Mansūra University- Egypt*, 43 (1982) pp.97-130, esp., p.113.

<sup>109</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, p. 501.

The Byzantine warfare against the Muslims in this period was characterised by some new elements. One of these new movements in Byzantine policy was to depopulate the Muslim cities and villages and deport their civilian populations into Byzantine lands, in a systematic and steady process. Contemporary sources include several accounts of this new policy.

The new stages of this policy appeared during the years 927 – 937AD./314-315H., when John Courcouas, the Byzantine general, of Armenian origin,<sup>110</sup> mounted several expeditions against the Muslims.<sup>111</sup> As Jenkins points out, the main characteristic of the policy of Gourgen's (John Courcouas) conquests was the wholesale importation of Moslem captives into the homeland of Anatolia.<sup>112</sup> Muslim sources speak of thousands of prisoners being taken.<sup>113</sup>

This deportation policy reached its climax during the reign of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas. Evidently, the first step in his tactic was to impose starvation on the Muslim populations in thughūr. This was done by burning their crops, year after year, cutting all the trees, and destroying the countryside.<sup>114</sup>

In 965AD./ 354H. the Byzantine army stormed Mopsuestia (Maṣīṣah). Immediately afterwards, Nikephoros Phokas imported a large number of Muslim people into the Byzantine lands. Ibn Miskawayh estimates their number to be 200,000.<sup>115</sup> The same narrative is quoted by Ibn al-Athīr, who adds that some Ṭarsans

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<sup>110</sup> - On John Courcouas, see Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, 1, pp. 217-223; A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, p. 262, note 2; P. Charanis, *The Armenians in the Byzantine empire* (Lisbon 1963) p. 30.

<sup>111</sup> - A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, pp. 261-270.

<sup>112</sup> - R. Jenkins, *Byzantium, the imperial centuries*, p. 247.

<sup>113</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 243, 288, 299-300.

<sup>114</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, pp. 825-826; *The Taktika of Nikephoros Ouranos, Sowing the Dragon's teeth*, p. 157; Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, p. 29 (German trans. F. Loretto, p. 34); al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 183; c.f. G. Dagron, 'Minorités ethniques et religieuses dans l'Orient byzantin à la fin du Xe et au XIe siècle: L'immigration syrienne', *TM* 6 (1976) p. 180.

<sup>115</sup> - Ibn Miskawayh, *Kitāb tajārib al-umam*, 2, p., 225; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7., p. 13-14; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 18 (does not mention the evacuation of Maṣīṣah's and the deporting of the people to the Byzantine lands, but he mentions their conversions); Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, pp. 56,60-61 (German trans. F. Loretto, p. 57, 61); Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 170; Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p.

sided with Nikephoros and converted to Christianity.<sup>116</sup> Bar Hebraeus is more specific about this mass conversion he says “And some of them were baptised and became Christians; others remained in their faith, but all their children were baptised”.<sup>117</sup> The only rational explanation for this narrative is that the mothers of these children were Byzantine slave girls, who married (or were forced to marry) Muslims but deserted their husbands, took their children and rejoined their Byzantine families.<sup>118</sup>

Similarly, when Byzantine armies seized Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān, the emperor Nikephoros deported more than 30,000 Muslims. Ibn Ḥawqal says, “He took 35,000 women, children and men”.<sup>119</sup>

Once again, the Byzantine army forced its way into Antioch, in 969 AD./358H. H. Instantly, after the atrocities of the first waves of attack, orders were issued to capture the Muslim prisoners of war and categorise them (men, woman and children). The emperor released the useless old men and women, and carried with him only young women and men. More than 20,000 were sent to Byzantine lands.<sup>120</sup>

The Muslim thinker al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, in his refutation of Christianity, gave special attention to the Byzantine policy of forced conversion which was imposed on some Muslim populations in Syria. He estimates their number as 20,000,000, which seems to be an exaggeration.<sup>121</sup> What is unique in his narrative is that he alludes to and strongly denies some alleged Christian claims: that these people

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769 (he says that the emperor carried away all the population of the city to the Byzantine lands, but he says on the same page, that the emperor appointed a Byzantine governor to the city, which was supposed to be deserted. The only possible explanation of this that some of population were allowed to stay in the city that is the local Arab Christians, or those who converted from Islam. On the expedition of Nikephoros against Syria, see G. Schlumberger, *Un empereur byzantin*, pp. 393-399. (he doubts the number of population mentioned by the Muslim sources)

<sup>116</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, p. 13-14; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I. p. 171.

<sup>118</sup> - Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, III, p. 357.

<sup>119</sup> - Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, p. 178.

<sup>120</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, pp. 36-37; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 45; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, 4, p. 55. Yaḥyā al-Antākī, PO. 18, pp. 822; Bar Hebraeus, I. p. 173;

<sup>121</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 183.

had been converted to Christianity, only by the miracles of saints.<sup>122</sup> This narrative, as far as I know, appears only in this polemical work. Apparently, this Christian notion was circulated on a popular level between Christians in the Muslim lands.

The Muslims of Crete were another group; they were captured by Byzantine armies in the tenth century, and assimilated into Byzantine society. On 7<sup>th</sup> March 961 AD./ 17 Muḥarram 350H. the Byzantine army stormed Chandax, the capital of Crete. Shortly afterwards, it committed a widespread massacre of the population.<sup>123</sup> The Muslim emir and his son were carried to Constantinople where they were humiliated in a triumphal parade.<sup>124</sup> Later they were assimilated into Byzantine society, even so they refused to convert to Christianity; some years later the emir's son died fighting with the Byzantine army.<sup>125</sup> This may indicate Byzantine tolerance and a willingness to accept those who kept their religion, or equally it could merely a feature of their tradition to treat prominent Muslim prisoners with good respect.

The fate of the common Cretan Muslims, however, was certainly very different. After the attack, there was a massive wave of bloodthirsty atrocities, as Leo the Deacon narrates. These atrocities were followed by dividing up the prisoners of war and enslaving the population.<sup>126</sup> The most important step was destroying the

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<sup>122</sup> -These stores say that a certain patriarch came from the Byzantine lands with the soldiers and he resurrected the dead. Immediately all of them stood in their tombs and followed him to the Byzantine lands. The other story claims that a monk called Michael came to al-Maṣīṣah city and changed the river to oil and all their sheep to horses. They all kissed the cross and went to the Byzantine lands. Al-Qāḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwah*, I, p. 183.

<sup>123</sup> -On the Byzantine re-conquest of Crete and the battle around Chandax, see Theophanes Cont., pp. 473-481; Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, pp. 5-16 (German trans. F. Loretto, pp. 13-22); Symeon Magister, pp. 758-760; see also D. Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete from the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the Venetian conquest*, (Athens 1988) pp. 61-74; G. Schlumberger, *Un empereur byzantin au dixième siècle: Nicéphore Phokas*, (Paris 1923) pp. 25-93; I. Ghunaym, *al-Imperātūryah al-Bizāntiyyah wa Krete al-'Islāmiyyah* (Byzantium and Islamic Crete) (Alexandria 1983) pp. 243-266. (In Arabic).

<sup>124</sup> -Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, p. 24 (German trans. F. Loretto, pp. 29) c.f. A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, p. 384; D. Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, p. 73; M. McCormick, *Eternal victory*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>125</sup> -Symeonis Magistri, p. 760.

<sup>126</sup> - Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, p. 27 (German trans. F. Loretto, p. 32); Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 782.

island's mosques.<sup>127</sup> This step foreshadows the subsequent policy of intolerance towards the remaining of Muslim population. Yet any further details on their fate are almost hazy, as Tsougarakis, points out.<sup>128</sup> One may safely presume that these people lost a large number of their men folk, as well as any hope for help from the Muslim world.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, their sacred places were destroyed. They were forced to convert to Christianity. Vita Nikon narrates that the saint stayed several years in Crete to re-convert the Greek population, and guide the island's Muslims to Christianity, a job that he fulfilled miraculously, according to the vita.<sup>130</sup> Presumably the Byzantine authorities supported these missionary activities among its new Muslim subjects. However, this story is similar to the Byzantine claims that the conversion of the civilian Muslim populations in Syria was achieved through miracles.<sup>131</sup>

In sum, the Byzantine Empire tried to assimilate some of its Arab neighbours by several methods. One of them, as has been shown, was to depopulate the Muslim cities and deport their populations, Muslim, Christian Arab or Armenian into Byzantine lands. Equally, it encouraged other groups to escape to Byzantium and rewarded whoever accepted the new life with special tax privileges, which will be studied in detail later in this chapter.

### **The Muslim community in Constantinople**

The Byzantine policy of assimilation of Muslims within its society ipso facto helped the Muslim colony to grow in Constantinople. The Muslims in Constantinople, as well as in other parts of the empire, could be divided into two main groups. Firstly,

<sup>127</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 782.

<sup>128</sup> - D Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, p. 74.

<sup>129</sup> - Cretan Muslim had called desperately for help from the Muslim world. Obviously, the only reaction came from the mobs in the Muslim world, which stormed a large number of local Christian churches. Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 782. C.f. D. Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, pp. 68-70; G. Schlumberger, *Un empereur byzantin au dixième siècle*, pp. 63-64; I. Ghunaym, *al-Imperātūriyyah al-Bizāntiyyah*, pp. 252-256.

<sup>130</sup> - D. Sullivan, (trans. and ed.) *The life of Saint Nikon* (Massachusetts 1987) pp. 83-87.

<sup>131</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwah*, I, pp. 183-184.



temporary settlers and visitors such merchants, spies disguised as merchants, ambassadors, political refugees; and finally, prisoners of war who hoped to be exchanged.

The second group includes the permanent Muslim settlers in Byzantium, such as renegades and apostates, civilian populations who were deported from their cities and had settled in Byzantium, and in addition the ill-fated Muslim prisoners of war who had to stay hopelessly for years.

Regardless of the group they belonged to, the Muslim communities in Constantinople, required buildings, in the city. Buildings allocated for Muslims were a mosque for all Muslims, a prison for the prisoners of war, a khan for the merchants; presumably a residence for those ambassadors who travelled to Byzantium should be included.

My main concern here is the religious life and facilities offered to these people in their new society. However, each group is different in the way it moved or was sent to live in Byzantine lands and the way in which it was treated by the authorities. It seems therefore, more appropriate to deal with each group separately.

The Constantinople mosque<sup>132</sup> is one of the most complex problems in studying Byzantine-Muslim relations. Contemporary sources scarcely made even cursory references to it. According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the mosque was built in the imperial *Praetorium*, where the distinguished Muslim prisoners were

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<sup>132</sup> -This mosque is believed to have been built in Constantinople during the expedition of the emir Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik in the reign of his brother Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik (715-717). Constantine Porphyrogenitus says, "At whose request (Maslama) was built the mosque of the Saracens in the imperial Praetorium", while the Muslim sources say that the Muslim emir stipulated the building of a special house (*Dar*) near his palace for the distinguished Muslim prisoners, so they could have special treatment. Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, p. 147, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, p. 93; c.f. M. Canard, 'Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople dans l'histoire et dans le légende', *JA* 208 (1926) pp. 61-121, reprinted in *idem*, *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, Variorum (London 1973) especially pp. 95-101; A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 236, note. 10

held.<sup>133</sup> Muslim sources narrate that the special house for Muslim prisoners was “by his (the emperor’s) palace and in the quarter”<sup>134</sup> which could mean the *Praetorium*. Canard points out that, this house and the mosque could be in the same place; “il est probable que cette maison devait contenir une mosqué ou tout au moins une salle de prières”.<sup>135</sup> It seems safe to assume that the Constantinople mosque and the special prison for the Arab elite in the *Praetorium* were almost the same place, inside the imperial complex, on the grounds that Muslim mosques do not require special buildings or special arrangements, just a big space and a place for washing.

During the Byzantine-Muslim warfare in the ninth and tenth centuries, the fate of this mosque was almost unknown. The only allusion to it comes in the letter of Nicholas I, patriarch of Constantinople, addressed to the ‘Abbasid caliph, saying, “The oratory of your co-religionists has not been pulled down”.<sup>136</sup>

Subsequently, almost nothing is said about this mosque. Presumably, it was closed during the tenth century, inasmuch as Byzantine armies, especially in the reigns of Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes, adopted a policy of destroying the mosques in the newly conquered lands in Syria. Presumably, the fate of a mosque inside Constantinople would certainly be no better. At best, one can assume that this place functioned as a prison rather than a mosque.

However, it is referred to again at the end of the tenth century, in 987 AD/377H a treaty between al-‘Azīz, the Fatimid caliph in Egypt and Basil II, in which

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<sup>133</sup> - Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, p. 148; the same narrative is confirmed by Byzantine sources. See Vita Euthymii, p. 21

<sup>134</sup> - Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, p. 147.

<sup>135</sup> - M. Canard, ‘Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople’, p. 95.

<sup>136</sup> - Nicholas I, *Letters*, p. 379.

they agreed to recite the khuṭbah in the Constantinople mosque in the name of al-‘Azīz.<sup>137</sup>

Evidently, this mosque was closed again soon, mostly, as a consequence of the harsh treatment by al-Ḥākim and his command to destroy the Christian sacred places in Jerusalem. There is no explicit evidence from any source about the closure of the mosque, but according to the treaty of 1027AD./ 418H. between the emperor Constantine VIII and the caliph al-Zāhir, the mosque was to be reopened, and furnished with new mats and lamps.<sup>138</sup>

Clearly, it is a misfortune that no more details are known about any other Muslim mosques in Byzantine lands. Both Byzantine and Arabic sources are completely silent, though there are several narratives which mention many Muslim mosques (in the Muslim lands in Syria and Crete), which were destroyed or profaned.<sup>139</sup>

The sole example referring to other Muslim mosques in the Byzantine lands occurs in 947 AD /336 H, when al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. al-Kalbī, the Fatimīd governor of Sicily, invaded a Byzantine city on the Italian coast, called Rio (Reggio),<sup>140</sup> where he had built a mosque. Soon afterwards, he concluded a treaty with Byzantium, forcing it to accept his terms concerning the mosque. This treaty stipulated that Muslims should be allowed to pray and maintain it, as well as giving permission to any Muslim prisoners

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<sup>137</sup> -Ibn Taghrī Bardī, 4, pp, 151-152; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-‘Islām*, p. 48. Both Ibn al-‘Adīm and al-Maqrīzī does not mention such a treaty: al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, II, pp. 263-266; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, pp. 25-33. On Fatimid-Byzantine relations at this period, see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp. 234-244. Mentioning the name of a Muslim ruler in the Friday prayer in the mosque means more than just religious prayers or sermons. It means the political and religious recognition of that emir or caliph as the Muslim leader. On some occasions the order of the names (when there are more than one) reflect exactly the importance of each name. As for the Fatimid such a treaty would be a very important step in their political propaganda against their rivals, the Sunni Abbasids, as it would show the Fatimid caliph to be the spiritual leader of the Muslim world.

<sup>138</sup> - Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, II, p. 176.

<sup>139</sup> - See Chapter 2 on the treatment of the sacred places.

<sup>140</sup> - On these Muslim campaigns, see A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, p. 365-367.

to enter this mosque (even if they had converted to Christianity).<sup>141</sup> This last term seems to be in response to the conversions, which were imposed on Muslim prisoners of war, and in fact alludes to cases of pretended conversion on the part of some of these prisoners of war. Presumably, this mosque was destroyed later.

### Renegades and apostates

Generally speaking, in almost all wars, there are always renegades and apostates who desert their side or religion and side with the enemy. Byzantine-Muslim warfare is no exception. Contemporary sources mention several examples on both sides. It should be noted that every renegade or apostate has his own individual reasons, and circumstances. Consequently, the treatment and response they received either from their own former side, or from the new side they fled to, were diverse.

There were in almost every single encounter between Byzantines and Muslims some renegades or apostates from one side or other. My main concern here is the religious motive and the consequences of this desertion and apostasy, as well as of mass apostasy.

On the battlefields, and in daily life, there were always some who were willing to side with the enemy for individual reasons, or simply for money, or honorary title. Additionally, the reasons could also be personal hatred towards a certain leader or emir, or to escape from a harsh treatment, or severe punishment,<sup>142</sup> or even for the sake of a love affair.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 328.

<sup>142</sup> -In Sicily, in 937 /325 H. The Fatimid emir Khalīl b. 'Ishāq took a very severe policy towards his Muslim subjects and killed a large number of them; consequently some converted to Christianity and deserted to Byzantium. Ibn 'Idharay, *al-bayān al-mughrib*, (Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne) I, p. 223.

<sup>143</sup> -In al-Aghānī of al-Aṣfāhī, a narrative about an Arab soldier. While taking part in a raid against Byzantium, he heard the sound of someone chanting Arabic poems inside a Byzantine castle. Immediately he was stunned and called the person. Soon, an Arab man appeared and said, "Not long ago I was in your place (outside the castle). I saw a girl, who stolen my heart. She asked me to convert to Christianity, so here I am". The Muslim offered to put his name on the list of prisoners of war to be exchanged, but he refused. Al-Aṣfāhī, *al-Aghāni*, 5, p. 186.

Contemporary sources list several examples of these apostates.<sup>144</sup> Some of the Byzantine renegades served in the Muslim fleets. In 872 the Arab Cretans attacked the Aegean islands, with the help of a certain Christian renegade called Photios.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, circa 910AD./ 297H. a Greek renegade called Damian (Ibn Dimyānh), converted to Islam, became a commander of the Muslim fleet in Syria and took part in Muslim war against Byzantium.<sup>146</sup> Interestingly, the Byzantine patriarch Nicholas I Mysticos says that he “rejected the beliefs of the Christians and disgraced the beliefs of the Saracens”.<sup>147</sup>

It seems clear that Byzantine desertion to the Muslims were mostly on an individual basis. There is no evidence of any systematic Muslim policy to encourage such people or to make use of them.<sup>148</sup> Though some of them served in the Muslim fleet, others simply disappeared into obscurity.

On the contrary, Byzantium always welcomed Arab tribesmen, or any other individual renegades, and encouraged them to call others to join them in their new life in Byzantine lands. It is true that many factors contributed to push some of these tribes to seek peace and safety, even under the Byzantine cross. One can list the

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<sup>144</sup> - In 294 H./ 906 AD. al-Ṭabarī narrates that a Byzantine Patrikios sided with Muslims and converted to Islam. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'rikh*, III; 4, pp. 2275-2276.

<sup>145</sup> - This Byzantine man soon served in the leadership of the Muslim fleet. Vita Basilii, 299- 300; N. Tobias, *Basil I*, pp. 219 –221; A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II: 2, pp. 52-55.

<sup>146</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6. p. 144.

<sup>147</sup> - Nicholas I, *Letters*, p. 9.

<sup>148</sup> - Qudamah b. Ja'afar, *kitāb kharāj*, BGA VI, p. 254. He criticized the Muslim policy towards the Paulicians, who were fighting against Byzantium and living in the border areas: the Muslims maltreated them and did not make use of them or their antagonism against Byzantium.

corrupt administrations, the conflicts between local emirs<sup>149</sup> and the absence of effective central power.<sup>150</sup>

Another less well-known reason for deserting and escaping to the enemy is the unique phenomenon of the families divided over the border. The best-known example is the father of the hero of the Digenes Akrites epic, whose family was divided. He managed to persuade his family to escape with him to Byzantium. Although it is a legendary story, most legends usually show some historical basics.<sup>151</sup>

Remarkably, the Byzantine border forts were used for several purposes: “first to observe the approach of the enemy; second, to receive the deserters from the enemy; third, to hold back any fugitive from our own side”.<sup>152</sup> The writer did not forget to insure that men at the front should not bring their families with them for fear they should escape to the enemy.<sup>153</sup> This text may indicate the continuous practice of desertion from both sides.

However, Byzantines were ready and willing to offer support, shelter, and tax privileges to those who escaped to the Byzantine lands and converted to Christianity or even to those who were willing to betray their masters for sake of money.<sup>154</sup> According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, special attention was given to

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<sup>149</sup> -In 1009AD./ 400 H. a Ḥamadaniid emir, the grandson of Sayf al-Dawlah, called Abū al-Haijā', used the help of a local Christian man to contact the emperor looking for help, but after his defeat he retreated to Constantinople where he was honoured with title of Magistros, and lived the rest of his life. Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 113. On the situation of Aleppo at this period, see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp. 188-193.

<sup>150</sup> -See for example, the last Umayyad caliph upon his defeat by the new 'Abbasid power, who was thought to have refuge in the Byzantine lands, but changed his mind after a discussion with one of his advisors. Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, III, p. 236.

<sup>151</sup> - Digenes Akrites, pp. 56-58

<sup>152</sup> - G. Dennis, *Three Byzantine military treatises*, p. 29.

<sup>153</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> - Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 75.

the distinguished persons among those deserters, even to allocate particular furniture and lavish clothes for them in preparing for the expeditions.<sup>155</sup>

Yet, fearing betrayal or harm, Byzantine authorities suspected these deserters, even after their conversion to Christianity. In his *Strategy*, the anonymous Byzantine author recommended that these deserters should:

“Always be watched, even if they observe our religious practices and become connected with us by lawful marriages. The more prominent men among them, therefore, should be kept in the cities if we so wish, unless we have reason to be suspicious of them, especially if the enemy from whom they deserted to join us should be moving against the city”.<sup>156</sup>

This text indicates clearly that the deserters were suspect for a long time, which may be the reason behind the Byzantine systematic policy of moving them away from the important cities as well as the strategic military sites. The most drastic application of this advice was the killing of thousands of Muslim prisoners, including those who had converted to Christianity, by the command of the empress Theodora.<sup>157</sup>

There are several examples of Muslims who deserted to Byzantium,<sup>158</sup> or even to Byzantine rebels.<sup>159</sup> In 931AD./ 319 H Banī ibn Nafīs, a man close to the caliph al-Muqtadir, escaped to Byzantium, converted to Christianity and took part in the

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<sup>155</sup> - Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three treatises on imperial expeditions*, pp. 109, 111.

<sup>156</sup> - G. Dennis, *Three Byzantine military treatises*, p. 121.

<sup>157</sup> -Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 142; al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'riḫ*, III: 3, p. 1427: al-Ṭabarī says that she forced the prisoners to convert and ordered the death of those who refused, but he does not confirm that she ordered the death of those who had already converted.

<sup>158</sup> -In 315 H / 927 a chief of Akraḍ (Curds) called Ibn al-Dahāq converted to Christianity and fled to Byzantium, where he was rewarded, but the Muslims met him on his way back from Byzantine lands and killed him and all of his men. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 190; Ibn Khaldūn, III, p. 386

<sup>159</sup> -The Byzantine rebel Bardas Skleros enlisted in his services a Muslim man, who converted to Christianity, called 'Ubayd Allah, and gave him the honorary Byzantine title of Magistratos. Ibn al-Athīr confirms the same story saying; “He (Bardas) conciliated some people from the desert”. Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 23, pp. 335-336, 372-373; al-Rudhrāwarī, *Dhayl kitāb tajārib al-umam*, pp. 13-15 (English translation, *Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, VI, pp. 4-6; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, p. 127. On this revolution and the political alliances with Muslims, see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp. 71-74.

Byzantine raids against the Muslims.<sup>160</sup> Presumably his conversion was not total, as he helped the Muslims in a crucial time.<sup>161</sup> In his polemical poem against Byzantium, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī mentions the phenomenon of conversion of some Arabs to Christianity.<sup>162</sup>

The main example of mass conversion is the Arab tribe of Banū Ḥabīb. The Muslim geographer, Ibn Ḥawqal, bitterly criticised the Ḥamdanids for their high taxes and their injustice, and narrates that the Ḥamdanids mistreated this tribe. Ten thousand horsemen with their slaves and cattle emigrated to the Byzantine lands, where they received a warm welcome. Soon they converted to Christianity and joined the Byzantine army in its war against the Muslims. Shortly after, they began to write to other Arabs, especially the member of their tribe, who stayed behind and encourage them to emigrate to Byzantium,<sup>163</sup> where they could find better treatment and more support. The Byzantines treated them well and bestowed on them villages and houses. This tribe and its men now waged war against the Muslims, making a good use of their previous knowledge of the land, and destroyed several Muslim forts. Having seen these activities against the Muslims, the emperor trusted them more. Ironically, the writer did not forget to praise those renegade Arabs as braver than the Byzantines.<sup>164</sup>

### **Prisoners of war between Byzantium and Islam**

One may consider prisoners of war as a permanent religious minority, inasmuch as most of them were forced to live in captivity for years, and were compelled to adopt a new kind of life and religion. In Byzantine-Muslim warfare,

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<sup>160</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 217; Ibn Khaldūn, III, p. 386 (who calls him Bani ibn Qays).

<sup>161</sup> - A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, p. 62.

<sup>162</sup> - Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'īyah*, 2, p. 183.

<sup>163</sup> - Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb surat al-'arḍ*, p. 211-213.

<sup>164</sup> - Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb surat al-'arḍ*, p. 211-213.



taking prisoners was the aim in almost all raids or combats. In the first place, they were crucial as source for valuable information,<sup>165</sup> or might be merely booty of war, slaves and slave girls.

In the ninth and tenth centuries, when Byzantium had the upper hand over the Muslims, there is evidence that Byzantium took special care to capture more Muslim prisoners. This is apparent from the great number of prisoners of war at this time.

In 916AD/ 303H. the Byzantine armies captured 50,000 Arabs from Ṭarsūs and Mar'ash.<sup>166</sup> Later in 942AD./ 330H. the Byzantine army captured 15,000 Muslims.<sup>167</sup> In 965 AD./ 354H. Nikephoros Phokas captured 200, 000 from the people of al-Maṣīṣah.<sup>168</sup> A few years later in 968AD./357H. the Byzantine armies captured 12,000 Muslims from the country around Antioch.<sup>169</sup> Again in 973AD./ 363H. the Byzantine armies captured 100,000 Muslim prisoners.<sup>170</sup> In an exaggerated narrative, al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, estimates the whole number of Muslim prisoners taken in the second half of the tenth century as 20, 000,000.<sup>171</sup> This seems to be an extreme over estimate, but is still clearly indicative of the large numbers of Muslim prisoners taken at this period.

### Treatment of prisoners of war

It is undoubtedly the case that the Byzantines were notorious for their ruthlessness towards prisoners of war.<sup>172</sup> In a meeting between Ibn Shahrām and the

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<sup>165</sup> - Nikephoros Phokas, *Parecepta militaria*, ed. and English trans, see McGeer, *Sowing the dragon's teeth*, pp. 51; 99; 101.

<sup>166</sup> - Bar Habraeus, I, p. 156.

<sup>167</sup> - Bar Habraeus, I, p. 162.

<sup>168</sup> -Bar Habraeus, I, p. 170; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, p. 29; neither Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī and Ibn al-'Adīm mentions such a number. See Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 814; Ibn al-'Adīm, p. 92.

<sup>169</sup> - Bar Habraeus, I, p. 172; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, pp. 13-14.

<sup>170</sup> - Ibn Aybak, *al-durah al-muḍyah*, 157.

<sup>171</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwah*, I, p. 183.

<sup>172</sup> -C.f. Liudprand of Cremona, p. 186, in which he tells that his stepfather, who was an ambassador to Constantinople, saw himself the execution of the Russian prisoners of war. See also S. Runciman, *The emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his reign* (Cambridge 1929) p. 33.

emperor Basil II, the Muslim ambassador said, “Although a prisoner in our hands, is not exposed, as your captives, to mutilation”, the emperor did not deny or even comment on this.<sup>173</sup> Yet modern scholars mostly tend to lay stress on the good treatment of Muslim prisoners of war in Byzantium.<sup>174</sup> They have built their theory on some Arabic texts, mainly Harūn ibn Yahya and al-Muqaddasī.

Harūn b. Yahyā narrates that the Muslim prisoners of war were brought to attend a special banquet with the emperor himself on Christmas Day. In this unique text, the Byzantine authorities respected the religious feeling and freedom of those Muslims and even prepared special food for them. The imperial herald said, “ I swear by the head of the emperor that in these meals there is no pork at all”.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, “when the last of these days (Christmas celebrations) comes, each Muhammedean captive shall receive two Dinars and three Dirhems”.<sup>176</sup>

The presence of Muslim prisoners of war at imperial Byzantine celebrations was mentioned by other Byzantine sources on several other occasions.<sup>177</sup> L. Simeonova puts forward several hypotheses to explain this phenomenon, considering it as a major shift in the Byzantine policy towards prisoners of war.

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<sup>173</sup> - Al-Rudhrāwarī, *Dhayl kitāb tajārib al-umam*, p. 32, (English translation, *Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, VI, p. 2; see H.F Amedroz, ‘An embassy from Baghdad to the emperor Basil II’ *JRAC* (1914) pp. 916-942.

<sup>174</sup> - A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, pp., 383-387; W. Reinert, ‘The Muslim presence in Constantinople, 9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries: some preliminary observations’, in H. Ahrweiler, and A. Laiou (eds.) *Studies in the internal diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, (Washington D.C. 1988) pp. 126-130; L. Simeonova, ‘In the depth of tenth-century Byzantine ceremonial: the treatment of Arab prisoners of war at imperial banquets’ *BMGS* 22 (1998) pp. 75-104, passim.

<sup>175</sup>-Ibn Rustah, *al-A‘lāq al-nafisah*, , p. 123, English trans. A. Vasiliev, ‘Harun ibn Yahya and his description of Constantinople’ *SK* 5 (1932) p. 157,

<sup>176</sup> - Ibn Rustah, *al-A‘lāq al-nafisah*, p. 123, English trans. A. Vasiliev, ‘Harun,’ p. 158.

<sup>177</sup> -Mainly during the reigns of Leo VI and Romanus Lecapenos. N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance Byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles*, (Paris 1972) pp. 169, 203, 209; Theophanes Cont., p.430. See the recent study: L. Simeonova, ‘In the depth of tenth-century Byzantine ceremonial’, pp. 75-104.

She realises that those who attended the imperial banquet were those living in the *Praetorium*.<sup>178</sup> We can consider them as VIPs. They were living as hostages rather than prisoners of war. In spite of the importance of such a practice, the number of overall prisoners who were well treated was just under 30. Hence, it could hardly be considered a major shift in the Byzantine policy towards prisoners of war.

Furthermore, if this story of the honourable treatment in Hārūn's narrative is to be accepted, the other side of it should be considered as well. Hārūn narrates that the Muslim prisoners of war were exposed to a kind of random fate, in which they might be killed because their destiny gave them no chance to pass through a certain gate.<sup>179</sup>

The hypotheses of L. Simeonova concerning what she called, *quasi-baptism* of Muslim prisoners of war, while they were attending the imperial celebration, lacks a solid ground to stand on, in my opinion. Yes, the whole process could be of importance for the emperor to be seen as a "truly universal ruler".<sup>180</sup> But to consider

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<sup>178</sup> -The Muslim sources say the *Praetorium* (Dar al-Bulāṭ), was the prison of the distinguished Arab prisoners who were being looked after, exempted from work, had their own religious freedom and the right to practise their prayers and were not forced to eat pork. Ibn Hawqal, does mention Dar al-Bulāṭ as a prison for the "king's prisoners" plus for other Byzantine prisons. Other Byzantine sources say that the same place (*Praetorium*) was used as a prison for distinguished Byzantine political prisoners of high figures, in the reign of Leo VI. Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb Surat al-'Arḍ*, p. 195; al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, pp. 147-148; Vita Euthymii, p. 21 (mentions the *Praetorium* as a jail for Muslim prisoners of war), p.113, mentions the same place as the prison of Nicetas of Paphlagonia in the reign of Leo VI. c.f., A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 2, p. 289, note. 1; A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, pp., 384-386; L. Simeonova, op.cit. p. 90, note 52.

<sup>179</sup> -Harūn says, "In the section of the city adjoining the Golden gate there is a vaulted bridge which has been built in the middle of the market (Vasiliev translated it as "square", but the Arabic word *sūq* literally means "market") of the city. There are therein two statues: one gives a sign with its hands as if it is saying "bring him here (Vasiliev erroneously translated it "come here") the other (statues) gives a sign with its hand as if it is saying "wait a little". They are two talismans. Captives are brought and placed between these two statues, hoping for pardon. Meanwhile a messenger goes to notify the Emperor thereupon. If on the messenger's return the captives stay (there) they are taken to prison; but if the messenger comes to them and sees them being passed (Vasiliev translated it to pass, but the Arabic text uses the passive mood) beyond the statues, they will be killed, and no one among them is left alive" Ibn Rustah, *al-A'lāq al-naḥḥīyah*, p. 131. English trans. A. Vasiliev, 'Harūn', p. 161. Although Vasiliev says (note 63) that he does not know the basis of this story, a similar story is mentioned in *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena, as an eyewitness to this Byzantine game of fate. Anna Comnena, *Aléxiad*, ed. B. Leib, II: 12, pp. 74-75, English trans, E.R.A. Sewter, p. 386

<sup>180</sup> - L. Simeonova, op. cit. p. 98.

this to involve “subjecting Muslims to a deeply coded ceremonial of conversion, of which they remained totally ignorant”<sup>181</sup> seems to be an implausible theory.

We know from the Byzantine and Muslim sources the unquestionable fact, that the Byzantines were keen to convert as many Muslim prisoners as they could. But from the same sources we know that Byzantines were suspicious of new Muslim converts and deserters.<sup>182</sup> The symbolic conversion or quasi-baptism is utterly contradicted by another Byzantine text concerning conversion of Muslims dated around the tenth century. This is the ritual of abjuration,<sup>183</sup> which was imposed on the new Muslim converts to make sure of their complete conversion. Here, there is no room for symbolism or quasi-baptism, only a very vigorous text which leaves absolutely no doubt of the conversion. Similarly, the emperor Michael III refused to accept those who converted, until they went to the border where prisoners of war were exchanged and returned willingly into Byzantine lands.<sup>184</sup> Though he may have done this to prove the willingness of those former Muslims in his negotiations with the Muslim ambassador, still there is was no room for quasi-baptism. The final point in my argument is that L. Simeonova, builds her theory on the basis of the white clothes of the Muslim prisoners of war, but we know that, in the triumphal parade of Nikephoros Phokas after his return from Crete, the Muslim prisoners of war were

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<sup>181</sup> - L. Simeonova, *op. cit.* p. 103.

<sup>182</sup> - G. Dennis, *Three Byzantine military treatises*, p. 121.

<sup>183</sup> -This document is a list of *anathemas* against Islam, Muḥammad, his family, his doctrine and his book, and even his so-called ὀλόσφυρος God. There is no known date for this document, but we know from Niketas Choniates that a comment from the emperor Manuel Comnenos attributes it to the “former emperors and members of the hierarchy”. Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker, (Bonn 1835) p. 278, English trans. *O city of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, English trans. H. J., Magoulias, (Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1984) 121-125; W. Eichner ‘Die Nachrichten über den Islam bei den Byzantinern’ *Der Islam* 23 (1936) 133-162; 197-244; Clermont-Ganneau, ‘Ancient rituel grec pour l’abjuration des Musulmans dans l’Église Grecque’ *RAO* 7 (1906) 254-257; D. Sahas, ‘Ritual of conversion from Islam to the Byzantine church [12th century]’, *GOTR* 36, (1991) pp. 57-69.

<sup>184</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 3, p. 1451.

wearing white clothes.<sup>185</sup> Should we consider the white clothes here a symbol of quasi-baptism?

As for the treatment of the prisoners, I cannot agree totally with the theories of modern western scholars who tend to accept that Muslims prisoners of war were treated well by the Byzantines. Re-reading the same Muslim sources already used by them supplies another interpretation of the story. As I have said, Harūn mentions the Muslim prisoners of war attending the imperial celebrations, but he says also that they were later killed. Al-Muqaddasī says that the prisoners in the *Praetorium* were well treated and looked after, but he says also that the common prisoners were enslaved in the imperial workshops.<sup>186</sup>

Abū Firas, the Ḥamdanids poet, says:

O, who has a spacious house, how do you widen it !!  
While we are (living) in stone and destroying stones  
O, who has a soft cloth, how do you change it !!  
While we cannot change our woollen clothes<sup>187</sup>

These verses are supported by the very fact that Byzantines used to send their prisoners of war and convicted criminals to work in the mines.<sup>188</sup> At the same time they confirm al-Muqaddasī's narrative that the Muslim prisoners were slaves who worked hard. Furthermore we have some narratives of the execution of prisoners of war, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

In sum, one can assume that the imperial treatment of prisoners of war depended on the personality of the emperor, as well as the rank of the prisoners themselves, and the exceptional imperial treatment had its purpose within the Byzantine world of symbolism, as L. Simeonova states, while the common prisoners

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<sup>185</sup> - Symeon Magister, pp. 759-760; M. McCormick, *The eternal victory*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>186</sup> - Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, p. 148.

<sup>187</sup> - Divan Abi Firās (Cited by R. Hassan, *al-Ma'ārik wa al-'asr bayn al-'arab wa al-rūm*, (the battles and captivity between Arabs and Byzantium) (Beirut 1985) p. 172.

<sup>188</sup> - S. Vryonis, 'The question of the Byzantine mines', *Speculum* 37: 1 (1962) pp. 2, 3.

were exposed to a policy of carrot and stick in order to convert them or at least make use of them in the imperial workshops.

It seems to me that the Byzantine prisoners of war in Muslim captivity fall into three different groups: the soldiers, the slave girls and the eunuchs. As for the eunuchs, there is a unique text of al-Muqaddasī, stating that Muslims in their raids used to storm churches looking for eunuchs to capture. Soon they found their way into the slave markets in Muslim lands,<sup>189</sup> inasmuch as they were wanted to serve in Muslim harems.<sup>190</sup> Those eunuchs, I would assume were never returned to Byzantium, unless the Muslim rulers had a shortfall of number in the exchange of prisoners of war. However, once these eunuchs were brought to any Muslim house, their new master would immediately expose them to essential Islamic education as a step towards assimilation into Muslim society.

The fate of the prisoners of war (of soldiers) was rather different, inasmuch as Islamic law gives three choices in dealing with prisoners of war and allows Muslim authorities to choose any according to circumstances. The first choice is the execution of all male soldiers; the second exchange for Muslim prisoners of war or ransom money, and the third was simply to set them free, according to the personal choice of the caliph or emir.<sup>191</sup> It is noteworthy that the prophet Muḥammad took all these three options at different points in his life. When the enemy was a local rebel whose army was annihilated, the first option was generally taken: the rebel's soldiers were usually executed and their leaders were sometimes crucified in Baghdad.

As for the Byzantine prisoners of war in Muslim lands, I would assume that two factors decided their fate, the general situation, or more accurately, the scale of

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<sup>189</sup> - Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, p. 242.

<sup>190</sup> - On the issue of the eunuchs in Islam, see D. Aylon, 'On the term khādim in the sense of eunuch in the early Islamic sources', *Arabica* 32 (1985) pp. 289-308; idem, 'On the eunuchs in Islam', *JSAI* 1 (1979) pp. 67-124.

the war between Byzantium and Muslims, and the personality of the caliph. In the middle of the ninth century, when the scale of the war turned against the Muslims, it seems that the mass executions such as Amorium<sup>192</sup> became a thing of the past. Furthermore, the number of Muslim prisoners of war in Byzantium exceeded the Byzantines in Muslim captivity, which forced the Muslim authorities to keep their Byzantine prisoners unharmed and unsold for future exchange.<sup>193</sup> We are even informed of a caliph who, in order to match the number of prisoners, had to send envoys to buy slaves of Byzantine origin from the slave markets. In order to complete the number required, he collected old Byzantine slave ladies from his own harem.<sup>194</sup>

Evidently, there was a Byzantine colony in Baghdad, which mainly comprised prisoners of war. We know that they had a church or a house in Baghdad set aside for them.<sup>195</sup> In Christian Arabic contemporary writings there are some allusions to these *Rum*, and their involvement in the disputes between local Christians in Iraq.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, in a decree for the Christian Catholicos (of the Nestorians) in Baghdad, there is a reflection of these quarrels.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> - Al-Māwardī, *al-aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya*, p. 131.

<sup>192</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'riḫ*, III: 2, p. 1255.

<sup>193</sup> -The Arabic sources narrate that Sayf al-Dawlah had run out of money and failed to offer payment to free the rest of the Muslim prisoners of war (since their number was more than the Byzantines), and this news reached the prisoners in Byzantium who thought to write to other Muslim rulers to collect their ransom money. The story appears in an admonitory poem of Abū Firās to Sayf al-Dawlah denying his involvement in calling for help from Khurasān. Abū Firās, *Divan*, (ed. al-Satir), pp. 30-31.

<sup>194</sup> -This exchange of prisoners of war occurred in 846 AD./231 H between the emperor Michael III, and the caliph al-Wāthiq. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'riḫ*, III: 2, p. 1355.

<sup>195</sup> -Yāqūt al-Ḥamāwī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, II, p. 511(ed. Beirut) he mentions a Dār (house) for the Byzantine prisoners, and later it was converted to a church; see: G. Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid caliphate* (Oxford 1924) p. 208; T. Arnold, *The preaching of Islam*, p. 67

<sup>196</sup> -Ibrāhīm b. Yuhanna, 'Vie du patriarche Melkite d'Antioche', p. 22.

<sup>197</sup> -In a decree from the caliph al-Qā'im (1031-1075AD./ 422-467H.) "You will hold power over all the Christian churches and councils without any competition from the Jacobites or Rum". Al-Qalqashandi, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, 10, p. 297.

Constantine Phokas had been captured by Sayf al-Dawlah 953AD / 342H. and remained in captivity until his death in 959AD./ 348 H.<sup>198</sup> When he fell ill, the Muslim doctors tried to heal him. After his death, his body was moved to a church to give it the appropriate Christian funeral prayers, and the emir sent a letter of condolence to his father.<sup>199</sup> Byzantine sources gave a different narrative, stating that Sayf al-Dawlah tried desperately to persuade his noble Byzantine prisoner to convert to Islam, but when he failed to do so, he poisoned him. When this rumour (or news) reached Byzantium, the father of Constantine, in his bitterness, killed all the Muslim prisoners whom he thought were related to Sayf al-Dawlah. The Muslims retaliated immediately with raids against Byzantium.<sup>200</sup>

In the Muslim lands, some of the Muslim rulers were praised for their generosity towards their Byzantine prisoners. Ibn Nabatah al-Sa'dī, in his panegyric on Sayf al-Dawlah, describes his generosity towards the Byzantine prisoners. Even the Byzantine emperor himself, he says, would wish to be among them.<sup>201</sup> Similarly, Ibn Hānī' al-Andalusī praises the caliph al-Mu'izz for his beneficence with the Byzantine prisoners.<sup>202</sup> Ironically this good treatment on the part of the Shiite caliph was used by Muslim Sunnis in anti-Fatimid propaganda.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> - Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al ḥalab*, p. 73; Ibn Shadād, *al-A'lāq al-khafīrah*, I, p. 259 (cited by M. Canard, *Sayf al-Dawlah: Recueil de textes*, p. 106, he accused Sayf al-Dawlah of over-estimating the ransom money of his prisoner, so the father later sent to poison his son!; Ibn Miskawayh devoted entirely this narratives of year to the local problems in the Iraq. On the Byzantine view, see John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, pp. 242-243, German trans., Hans Thurn, p. 281-281.

<sup>199</sup> - Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 771; ed. L. Cheikho, p. 113.

<sup>200</sup> - John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, p. 243, German trans., Hans Thurn, p. 281.

<sup>201</sup> - Divan Ibn Nabātah, (cited by M. Canard, *Sayf al-Dawlah, Recueil de textes*, p. 309).

<sup>202</sup> - Ibn Aybak, *al-durah al mudyah*, 248.

<sup>203</sup> - "Whenever a Muslim from al-Shām or Egypt conquered the Rum, and brought prisoners of war, this sultan (the Fatimid caliph) took them, treated them well and gave them the best house. Then he said to them that, whoever wished to would be welcome, and those who wished to leave (to go to Byzantium) could do so safely". Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār *Tahbīt dalā'il al-nubuwah*, 2, p. 343.



However, there are some accounts of prisoners of war which should be cited here. It seems that some individuals were forced to seek the freedom of their relatives by their own efforts. Al-Tanūkhī narrates, “A man from the border area was seeking financial help in Baghdad to free some of his relatives who were captives in Byzantine lands.”<sup>204</sup> A similar story occurred on the other side. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī narrates that a Byzantine man travelled secretly (presumably disguised as a merchant) to Baghdad trying desperately to rescue his son, who was a prisoner and had converted to Islam.<sup>205</sup>

Similarly, donating some money to free the prisoners of war was a common charitable practice in both Byzantium and Muslim states. We know from the vita of Saint Mary the younger (10<sup>th</sup> century) that she set aside money to freeing captives<sup>206</sup>

It is worth noting here that in. 896AD/ 283H al-Ṭabarī narrates that the Byzantine authorities armed some of the Muslim prisoners of war and sent them to fight against the Bulgars. Having gained the victory, the emperor apprehended them and scattered them into different cities.<sup>207</sup> There is no mention of such a narrative in the Greek sources.<sup>208</sup> Surprisingly, al-Mas‘ūdī, narrates a similar story, attributing it to the emperor Michael III, who allegedly used these prisoners against a local Byzantine rebel.<sup>209</sup> Prisoners of war were used on several occasions as diplomatic gifts between the two sides as a sign of good will.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> - Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muhādarah*, p. 166. There is a clear possibility that such a story is fake, as similar had been committed by the name of Jihad, see C. E. Bosworth, ‘Byzantium and the Arabs: war and peace’, pp. 12-13.

<sup>205</sup> - Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād*, 7, p. 135.

<sup>206</sup> - It is not clear from the vita whether these Byzantine prisoners were in Muslim or Bulgarian captivity. A. M. Talbot (ed.) *The holy women of Byzantium, vita saint Mary the younger*, p. 267.

<sup>207</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III, 4, pp. 2102-2103; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 152.

<sup>208</sup> - A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his world*, p. 358

<sup>209</sup> - Al-Mas‘ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf*, p. 161.

<sup>210</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 4, p. 2239 (902 AD/ 290 H); (906 / 294 H), p. 2277; Bar Hebraeus, (865 A.D) 1, p. 144; 155 (907AD).

In sum, prisoners of war were a special human bridge between Byzantium and the Muslim world. The Muslim prisoners of war were often exposed to Byzantine curiosity, in religious matters, which may have helped to create more understanding and tolerance in this era. Some others who converted here or there, willingly or not, must surely have helped to make translations and transfer knowledge, even at lower levels, between the two worlds. Finally most of the Arab geographers gained their information about Byzantium through the Muslim or Byzantine prisoners of war.<sup>211</sup>

### **The execution of prisoners of war**

On some occasions, however, both Byzantine and Muslim authorities killed some of their prisoners of war. In 855-856AD./ 240-241H. a Byzantine army under the command of Theoctistus sacked 'Aīzarba and took 12,000 Muslim prisoners, some of whom were killed.<sup>212</sup> This raid seemed to be a late revenge for the Byzantine prisoners of Amorium who had been killed some years earlier.<sup>213</sup>

Occasionally, the execution of prisoners of war appeared as a strategic necessity on the battlefield. The emperor Basil I, in one of his campaigns against Muslims, was apprehended in a sudden attack through narrow rough passes, hindered by lack of men, and in need of the soldiers who had been assigned to guarding the prisoners. He ordered a great number of Muslim prisoners of war to be killed.<sup>214</sup> Again, he instructs that the Cretan Muslims who fell into his hand be skinned, presumably to scare the others.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> - Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 4, p. 198. Also Ibn Rustah used the narrative of Hārūn b. Yaḥyā

<sup>212</sup> -Al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 3, p. 1427; Bar Hebarus, p. 142.

<sup>213</sup> - W. Treadgold, *A history of the Byzantine state and society*, p. 449

<sup>214</sup> - John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, p.142 (German trans. J. Thurn, p. 179); Theophanes Cont. p. 283.

<sup>215</sup> -Theophanes cont., p. 301, German trans., Constantine VII Prophyrogenitus, *Leben des Kaisers Basileios I*, p. 111.

Once more, the same emperor, to force his sailors to fight against Muslims, had 30 Muslim prisoners disguised as Byzantine sailors, who deserted their fleet, and ordered their hair and beards to be burnt. Later, according to Genesios:

“He had them severely whipped in the hippodrome as though they were deserters from the navy ... They were carried through the city naked and mounted on mules all the way to the Golden Gate ... when these things had been carried out; the men were taken to Methone to be impaled as cowardly deserters of war ... And all the prisoners were impaled”<sup>216</sup>

The main aim of the emperor was not the execution of these Muslim prisoners, but a threat to his own sailors should be terrified by such cruel punishment imposed on those ill-fated Muslim prisoners of war.<sup>217</sup>

In 965AD./ 354H. both Muslim and Byzantine armies around Ṭarsūs, executed the prisoners on both sides, in revenge and counter-revenge. The Byzantines killed 100 distinguished Muslim men, in order to demoralise the besieged population of the city, who executed 3000 Byzantine prisoners in retaliation.<sup>218</sup>

According to the Muslim sources, in 962AD. / 351 H. Nikephoros Phokas, in rage at the death of his nephew, ordered 12,000 Muslim prisoners to be killed.<sup>219</sup> This number seems to be an exaggeration.<sup>220</sup>

Muslims applied a similar severe treatment in a parallel revenge. In 965AD / 345 H., Sayf al-Dawlah discovered a Byzantine plot to bribe some of his men to capture him and hand him over to the Byzantine army. In his fury, he killed all the

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<sup>216</sup> - Genesios, *Regum libri quattuor*, p. 84, English trans. A. Kaldellis, p. 105.

<sup>217</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> - Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 18.

<sup>219</sup> - Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 81.

<sup>220</sup> - Ibn al-'Adīm says he is not sure about this number and reduces it later to 1200 men. Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 82; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 169; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, 3, p. 332; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 8. All of them give the second number 1200 men.

Byzantine prisoners, who numbered around 400.<sup>221</sup> However, this kind of cruelty has no religious implication, rather an exaggerated reaction to this plot.

### **The public parade of the prisoners**

During the Muslim-Byzantine wars, it was common practice to parade the prisoners, or even the heads of the enemies in the streets, drawing special attention to those of higher rank. These parades usually took place in the streets of the Constantinople, leading to a special celebration in the hippodrome.<sup>222</sup>

The parade of enemy prisoners in Byzantium was an old practice,<sup>223</sup> in which the authorities used to please the frenzied mobs by showing the heads or bodies of the killed enemies, or parade the prisoners. The custom practised with Muslim prisoners was somewhat different. It had some religious emphasis; special hymns and songs were sang to praise God who has routed the enemies who denied the divinity of Christ.

In 956AD./ 344H. the Ḥamdanid emir Abu al-‘Ashā’ir was captured by the Byzantines. The ill-fated emir was carried to Constantinople where he was humiliated in the triumphal parade. The emir had to kneel in front of the emperor, who put his feet on the head of the miserable emir, while the rest of the prisoners were ordered to lie on the ground. The patriarch and the clergy took part in this celebration, and the imperial choristers sang special prayers to God, who supports them against sons of Hajar.<sup>224</sup> In this celebration they chose a special text from the Old Testament, to apply to this victory over the Muslims, “What God is great like our God? Thou art the God

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<sup>221</sup> - Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 75.

<sup>222</sup> - Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three treatises on imperial military expeditions*, pp. 141,149,151.

<sup>223</sup> - McCormick, *Eternal victory*, pp. 50, 61, 65.

<sup>224</sup> -Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis*, 2:19, pp. 607-612; John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, p., 241, German trans., Hans Thurn, pp. 281-282. For a full discussion on this particular celebration, see McCormick, *Eternal victory*, pp. 160-193.

who works wonders" (Ps 76, 14-15).<sup>225</sup> Again in 961AD/ 356 H. similar celebrations were held upon the Byzantine re-conquest of Crete, and the capture of its emir with a great number of Muslim prisoners.

In a word, one can assume that the parade of the prisoners was a common practice in both Byzantium and Muslim lands. In Byzantium, these parades, as McCormick points out,<sup>226</sup> were a legacy from Rome, developed with some Christian features. Some elements were added and should be pointed out. The Church took part; the patriarch attended the celebrations; these chants,<sup>227</sup> sermons and prayers. There is an anti-Islamic current of feeling which gives explicit impression of the victory of Christianity over its enemies being celebrated.

At the same time, Muslim caliphs and emirs used also to disgrace their captive rivals, by humiliating them in long parades through the streets. This practice applied to both Byzantine and Muslim captives. Apparently, it was applied more drastically against Muslims.

### **Religious pressures on prisoners of war**

Contemporary sources relate several stories of religious pressure on the prisoners of war to convert to the opposite religion. There are several Byzantine texts, mainly hagiographical, which inform us of Muslim attempts to convert their Byzantine prisoners of war, when the Muslims had the upper hand.<sup>228</sup> Al-Ṭabarī narrates that in 859 AD./245 H a Byzantine general was captured by Muslims; later

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<sup>225</sup> -Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis*, 2:19, pp. 607-612; See McCormick, *The eternal victory*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>226</sup> - McCormick, *The eternal victory*, passim.

<sup>227</sup> - Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis*, I: 69, pp. 332-333.

<sup>228</sup> -F. Halkin, 'Passion inédite des Quarante-deux martyrs d'Amorium', Greek text pp. 152-161; French translation. 162-169; P. Peeters, (ed.) 'Vita S. Romain le Némartyr (d. I mai 780) d'après un document géorgien', *AB* 30, pp. 393-427.

they tried to persuade him to convert to Islam, and threatened to kill him. Unfortunately, al-Ṭabarī does not add any more details about the fate of this man.<sup>229</sup>

Muslim sources, narrate too similar stories bearing the hagiographical nature of exaggeration and fantasy, such as the narrative of the tenth century Muslim judge and writer al-Tanūkhī.<sup>230</sup> In a lengthy story, the Muslim former prisoner gives us some valuable details. The Muslim had a religious debate with the Christian clerics in Constantinople, in which he insisted on arguing with the patriarch himself, and in the presence of the emperor. Of this story there is a striking similarity with the debate of al-Bāqillānī in *Constrainable* in which he sarcastically asked the patriarch about his family.<sup>231</sup>

Obviously, the man certainly exaggerates the account of his time there and his friendship with a Byzantine general, and certainly fabricates the story of the Byzantine general. But the whole narrative still reflects the likelihood of inevitable

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<sup>229</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, III: 3, p., 1448.

<sup>230</sup> -He narrates, in a lengthy story of 9 pages with elaborate detail, that in the Umayyad period, in the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (685-705), a Muslim man had been captured earlier in the reign of Mu‘wāiyā I (661-680), and in the reign of an emperor he called *Warqa’ b. Muwariqah* (An Arab name which is almost impossible to accept as a distortion of the name of the emperor Constans II (641-668) or his successor Constantine IV (668-685). The Byzantine emperor had released the Muslim prisoner, and sent him with an escort to the Muslim lands. The caliph was curious to hear from this man, about his time there and why the emperor had personally cared about his fate. The Arab prisoner said the new emperor had adopted a new policy of moving Muslim prisoners between the Byzantine leaders, of which there were 12. This policy was applied by random selection, to ensure that no Muslim prisoner would stay long in the same area. The hero of the story was handed over to a certain general with a bad reputation and hatred of Muslims. Surprisingly, both men found out that they speak one another language fluently. The Muslim prisoner befriended the Byzantine, who told him, as a consolation, a long mythical story of his youth, and how he himself had been captured in the land of *Rakhān*, (?) and his long ordeal there had ended with his marriage to the King’s daughter. The Byzantine man, however, had been informed that according to the traditions of *Rakhān*, if one partner of a couple died, they were both put in a deep well till they were both dead. However, in a long episode, his wife became sick and nearly died, so they put them in a well, and after a while he managed to escape and return safely to his father and family in Byzantium. Some time later he became a Byzantine general, who now was in charge of our Arab prisoner, and befriended him. Later, the Muslim prisoner appeared at the imperial court and had a debate with the Patriarch, in which the Muslim refuted in mockery the Christian notion of the Son of God. In this discussion, the Muslim began to greet the patriarch and ask him about his health, that of his son! The whole audience in the court started to laugh and to mock the Arab man. The Muslim replied “God preserved this Patriarch....and you glorify and praise him, because he has no sons ... How could you do this and at the same time attribute a son to almighty God?”. At the end he returned safely and was escorted back to the Muslim territory. Al-Tanūkhī, *Kitāb al-Faraj ba’d al-shidah*, I, pp. 139-147.

religious debates with prisoners in Byzantium, which coincides with other Arabic narratives.

The beginnings of such policy occurred when the empress Theodora forced 12,000 Muslim prisoners to convert to Christianity and the caliph al-Mutawakkil's desperate attempts to save them failed. But even the authorities in Byzantium killed those who had converted when they felt that these people tend to their old religion.

Bar Hebraeus narrates:

She said, these were baptised and were Christians, and it is impossible for us to give them up', and when Nasīf (the page of the caliph), went forth, Theodora killed them all because she saw that they were inclined to a going forth, though they had believed and were baptised,; others say that Nikola, her eunuch, killed them without the queen's command".<sup>232</sup>

The late Muslim historian Ibn Khaldūn says that she forced these prisoners to convert. Hence a large number of them converted, and she sent to the caliph to exchange prisoners who had kept their religion.<sup>233</sup> The same policy was continued in the region of the emperor Basil I, who ordered the flaying and execution of Cretan Muslims who refused to convert to Christianity.<sup>234</sup>

Abū Firās, (d. 968/ 357) a Muslim emir, poet and prisoner of war in Byzantium, wrote some poems of poetry about his bitter experience in captivity. It is noteworthy that he speaks about some kind of religious pressure or discussion involving the Muslim prisoners in Byzantium. He says:

What a strange matter, that an 'alij<sup>235</sup>  
teaches me what is lawful and prohibited<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> - See infra chapter 5, p. 288.

<sup>232</sup> -Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'rikh*, III: 3, P. 1427; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 142.

<sup>233</sup> - Ibn Khaldūn, III, p. 277.

<sup>234</sup> -Theophanes Cont., p. 301, German trans., Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *Leben des kaisers Basileios I*, p. 111.

<sup>235</sup> - An Arabic word used for a man who is not Muslim or non-Arab. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'rikh*, III: 2. p.1359.

<sup>236</sup> - N. 'Abd al-Rḥmān, *Shi'r al-ṣirā' ma'a al-rūm*, (the poetry of the struggle with Rum/ Byzantines) (Amman- Jordan 1977) p. 283.

The late Muslim historian al-Dhahabī narrates that a Muslim cleric, called ‘Alī Abū Ḥasan al-Billānī was captured in a Byzantine raid, and carried to Byzantium. Soon they discovered his Islamic knowledge, so the emperor himself debated with him on religious issues.<sup>237</sup>

### Conversion of prisoners of war

In the history of the struggle between Byzantium and Islam, it is difficult to trace even the fragments of information from contemporary sources which might shed light on the religious life of the prisoners of war on both sides. However, one can still argue that there was a systematic Byzantine policy of converting Muslim prisoners or at least encouraging them to accept baptism.

One of the first allusions to such a practice is mentioned in the biography of ‘Umar II, that the caliph sent a messenger to the emperor (Leo III). After the initial meeting with the emperor, the Arab ambassador was wandered about the streets of Constantinople, when he found a man reciting the Qur’ān. He approached him and told him that he was the ambassador of ‘Umar, and asked him about his life and personality. The man said he was a prisoner and the emperor had asked him to convert to Christianity but he refused, so he was blinded.<sup>238</sup> Once this news reached the caliph he sent an angry letter to the emperor requesting the prisoner’s release. The same ambassador returned again to Byzantium and set the blinded man free.<sup>239</sup>

In 865AD./ 251H. the caliph al-Mutawakkil sent an ambassador to the emperor Michael III, to discuss peace between them. In this embassy;

“ ... when some of the Arabs were baptised, the king of Rum commanded that they should all go as far as the frontier which is between us and the

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<sup>237</sup> - Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, p. 244.

<sup>238</sup> - Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakm, *Sīrat ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>239</sup> - Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, *Sīrat ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, pp. 175-176.



Arabs. And he who chose Christianity, and came back from it there, we would receive as a true believer”<sup>240</sup>

This may be derived from a discussion about the fate of these men, between the emperor and the Arab ambassador.

In most cases there were rewards and splendid gifts to be given to any one who converted from Islam.<sup>241</sup> A Byzantine legal decree concerning Muslim captives in a particular category who were baptised in a certain theme, explicitly shows this Byzantine policy:

" Take note that they must each one of them receive three *nomismata* from the *protonotarios* of the theme, six *nomismata* for their yoke of oxen, and fifty-four modios (μόδιος)<sup>242</sup> of grain for their seed and provisions.

Note that concerning land-owning families who adopt Saracen prisoners as sons-in law, whether they are military or civil are exempted for three years from land tax and hearth tax. After three years these households are obliged once more to pay land tax and hearth tax. Note that when the captives or others are given land for settlement, they shall remain free from all services to the fisc for three years, and they shall pay neither hearth tax nor land tax. After the completion three years, they pay land tax and hearth tax" <sup>243</sup>

These tax privileges were only given to the Muslim prisoners when they converted to Christianity, provided they were used in the military service.<sup>244</sup> Presumably this refers only to those who could pass through the ritual of abjuration, to make sure they were converted in their hearts. I doubt if they would have been employed in the war against the Muslims, inasmuch as we know from the Byzantine

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<sup>240</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'riḫ*, III, 3, p. 1451; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 144.

<sup>241</sup> -See the narrative of Matthew of Edessa, about the Muslim local emir in Edessa called Salmān, who converted to Christianity, and got a reward from the emperor, p. 54.

<sup>242</sup> - A measurement unit for grain of around 20 pounds of wheat. See. *ODB*, s.v. ' modios',

<sup>243</sup> -Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis*, II, 49, pp. 694-695; English trans.: McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's teeth*, p. 366; A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his world*, pp. 82-83; P. Lemerle, *Agrarian history of Byzantium*, 133-135.

<sup>244</sup> - Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis*, II, p. 661.

sources that they suspected even Byzantines who had been captive for a while in Muslim lands, and never allowed them to hold forts on the frontier. A fortiori, this provision certainly was applied to Muslims as well.

Beside these privileges, there was a policy of forcing Muslim prisoners of war to convert to Christianity. There are several examples to show that the Byzantine authorities, beside their peaceful policy of converting Muslim prisoners, also used the sword to convert them.

However, the details of religious and social life of those converted Arabs, in their new society in Byzantine lands, are almost hazy. We have some contradictory fragments from both Byzantine and Muslim sources. The most important one is al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār in his polemical work against Christianity. The text is very important and has had only scant attention from modern scholars.<sup>245</sup> He describes the experiences of those prisoners who stayed in Byzantium and converted to Christianity. There are some notable remarks in his text. First, he does not indicate (in any previous section) that the Byzantines forced them to convert; in contrast he states that some of them had converted when they felt hopeless and desperate of any help from the Muslims. He quotes a certain Muslim prisoner, who says that those prisoners of war after a long time in Byzantium and with no hope of any aid from the Muslim world, pretended to be Christians. Later they married Byzantine women. More important, he mentions that those Arabs were soon recruited for the Byzantine army, interestingly only to guard some fields. (This may confirm the hazy reports of al-Ṭabarī and al-Mas‘ūdī of enlisting Muslim prisoners in the service of the Byzantine army.)<sup>246</sup> The most interesting point to emerge is that the Muslim mentality could not cope with the freedom of the Byzantine women. The writer speaks bitterly of how he

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<sup>245</sup> - A translation of the whole passage appears in the Appendix .

<sup>246</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tā’rīkh*, III, 4, pp. 2102-2103; al-Mas‘ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf*, p. 161.

lost his jealousy and accepted the fact that his wife committed adultery while he was serving in the army.<sup>247</sup>

The narrative of the Muslim prisoners of war confirms the Byzantine policy of assimilating the Arab prisoners. We know from the vita of St. Theodora of Thessalonica (late 9<sup>th</sup>) that an Arab converted man was living near Thessalonika,<sup>248</sup> which indicates the dispersal of converted Arabs throughout the empire.

Equally, an early imperial Byzantine edict in the reign of the emperor Theophilos (829-842), was issued to the effect that “unmarried women and widows should be given in marriage to foreign men”.<sup>249</sup> Although the word ἔθνικοι could mean, as the translator points out,<sup>250</sup> any other foreigners, Christian or converted, the edict reflects a steady Byzantine policy to assimilate foreigners within Byzantine society.<sup>251</sup> This policy seems to have lasted for a long time.<sup>252</sup>

However, the situation of Byzantine prisoners in Muslim lands needs to be examined in the light of the available sources. We have the same combination of carrot and stick, but evidently Muslims were not, at this point of their history, keen to assimilate Byzantine prisoners in their society. The only exception were the Byzantine slave girls and eunuchs who were needed in the Muslim world.

In a unique narrative, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, informs us of his friend, a Byzantine prisoner of war who embraced Islam and lived in Baghdad:

“Bushrā b. Masīs Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rūmi, told me that, as an was adult, he was taken captive from the Byzantine lands. He said that a member of the

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<sup>247</sup> - On Byzantine women, the accusation of adultery and the reaction of their men. See A. M Talbot, (ed.) *The holy women of Byzantium; Vita Saint Mary the younger*, p. 263, 264, 266. In which a husband imprisons his wife upon hearing some slanders against her.

<sup>248</sup> - A. M. Talbot, (ed.) *The holy women of Byzantium; vita Theodora of Thessalonike*, p. 212.

<sup>249</sup> - A. M. Talbot, (ed.) *The holy women of Byzantium; vita Athanasia of Aegina*, p. 143.

<sup>250</sup> - Ibid, note, 22.

<sup>251</sup> - R. S. Lopez, ‘The foreigners in Byzantium’, no. XIV, in idem, *Byzantium and the world around it: economic and institutional relations* (London 1978) p. 343.

Ḥamdīnīd family gave him as a gift to a certain Muslim called Fātin *who* cultivated him, and taught him the Ḥadīth, until he became an authority on Ḥadīth. He told me that his father came secretly to Baghdad looking for him, but he gave up when he saw his son involved in ‘ilm (religious study) and when he saw how strong his Islamic faith, he returned home”

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The authenticity of the narrative is unquestionable, as first hand information and an eyewitness account. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baḡhdādī narrates again, unfortunately with more ambiguity, the story of a man called Constantine b. ‘Abd allah al-Rūmī (i.e. the Byzantine), who was *Mawla*<sup>254</sup> of the caliph al-M‘utamīd (870-892/ 256-279H.) who became an authority on Ḥadīth.<sup>255</sup> The man was apparently a Byzantine, though we do not know any more about him. One cannot, however, dismiss the possibility, if not the certainty, that he was a former prisoner of war, who was brought to Muslim lands, probably when he was a child, converted to Islam, and received a proper Islamic education. Similarly, al-Mas‘ūdī drew most of his information about Byzantium from the Byzantine prisoners of war who converted to Islam.<sup>256</sup>

### Christian Arab prisoners in Byzantium

Among the large number of Muslim prisoners captured by the Byzantine armies, there were some Arab Christians. These Christian Arabs were certainly not soldiers. As the Islam law forbids them from taking part in war in return of the Jizya they pay. These groups of Arab prisoners have not, to my knowledge, been studied in recent historical works.

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<sup>252</sup> -Anna Comnena mentions a certain Byzantine general, whose father was a Muslim prisoner of war, Anna Comnena, *Aléxiad*, ed. B. Leib, I: 4, p. 151 25-27, English trans. E.R.A. Sewter, p. 141.

<sup>253</sup> - Al-Khaṭīb al-Baḡhdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baḡhdād*, 7, p. 135.

<sup>254</sup> -A free slave, or non-Arab who annexed himself to a well-known Arab man or family, as some kind of protégé.

<sup>255</sup> - Al-Khaṭīb al-Baḡhdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baḡhdād*, 12, p. 478.

<sup>256</sup> - Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 4, p. 198.

Muslim historians give several examples of this category. The Byzantine naval raid against Damietta in 853/ 238H captured a large number of people. More than 1000 Coptic women were among them.<sup>257</sup> Again, in 901AD./ 288 H al-Ṭabarī narrates that a Byzantine raid against Kisūm captured some Arab Christians.<sup>258</sup>

These events, though a few in number, are still completely obscure and it is a misfortune that no further details are known about all the circumstances. Unfortunately, we have no answer as to why the Byzantines captured these Christians. One can assume that the language barrier, and a supposed Byzantine fear of being tricked, led them to capture all they found indiscriminately, regardless of any possible and immediate discrimination between Muslim and Christian prisoners.

Here once again there is no information whatsoever about their conditions in Byzantine lands, and whether they were singled out and treated in a special and different way from the Muslims. In some Byzantine military texts there are some warnings concerning those who desert to Byzantine lands, that being Christian is not enough to prevent the Byzantines from mistrusting them.<sup>259</sup> This warning could easily apply to the Christians Arab, at least for a while.

One can suppose that they certain to have been separated from the other Muslim prisoners. I do not have any evidence to support my hypothesis, but I presume that these Arab Christians would have been anxious to identify themselves (as Christians) on every possible occasion to secure better treatment. Support for this is found in the narrative of al-Tanūkhī. On the arrival of the embassy of the vizier ‘Alī b. ‘Isā, Byzantine authorities separated the Muslim from the Christian members of the

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<sup>257</sup>-Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III, 3, P. 1418; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2, pp. 596-597; al-Kindī, *Kitāb ‘Umara’ Miṣr*, p. 201.

<sup>258</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III, 4, p. 2205.

<sup>259</sup> - G. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military treatises*, p.121.

delegation.<sup>260</sup> This could be applied on the treatment of Christian Arabs who were captured among Muslim prisoners of war. Recently, Berger points out the possibility of a Christian identity for the most famous Arab prisoner in Constantinople, Hārūn b. Yaḥyā, in light of the privileges which he enjoyed, such as visiting the interior of the churches and his apparently risk-free travelling to Rome.<sup>261</sup> Interestingly, Ibn al-Muqaffa' narrates the efforts by the Egyptian church to look after some Byzantine prisoners of war in Egypt.<sup>262</sup>

In 986AD./ 376H. in a treaty between Ṣimṣām al-Dawlah of Daylamite Būyids, and the Byzantine rebel Bardas Skleros, there is a term concerning the release of the Muslim prisoners of war, as well as the Christian Arabs, provided they wish to return to Muslims land.<sup>263</sup> Although it is a treaty with a rebel, but it does reflect Muslim willingness and care to free their Christian subjects.

The Muslim authorities were willing to pay a ransom or exchange prisoners to set free the Christian Arabs who were captured in Byzantine hands. Al-Mas'ūdi says, the terms in the exchanges of prisoners are not valid necessarily for the Christians Arabs,<sup>264</sup> but that Christian Arabs could be exchanged in return for some Byzantine prisoners of war, regardless of the traditional terms of equivalence in number and

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<sup>260</sup> - Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muhādarah*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>261</sup> -A. Berger, 'Sightseeing in Constantinople: Arab travellers, ca. 900-1300', unpublished paper delivered at the 34th. Spring symposium of Byzantine studies (Birmingham, April 2000)

<sup>262</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, p. 249.

<sup>263</sup> - Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, 14, pp. 20-24; Al-Rudhrāwarī, *Dhayl kitāb tajārib al-umam*, p. 11, English trans. *Continuation of the experiences of the nations*, p. 116. On this treaty, see M. Canard, 'Deux documents arabes sur Bardas Skléros', no. XI in idem, *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, Variorum (London 1973); On the historical background of this treaty, see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours*, pp. 71-99. Al-Rudhrāwarī summarises the terms of the treaty but does not mention this specific term concerning the Christian Arabs.

<sup>264</sup> -There were several instances of exchanges of prisoners between Byzantium and Muslims. See al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-ishrāf*, pp. 176-182; H. Zayyān, *al-Asrā al-Muslmīn fī bilād al-rūm*, (The Muslim prisoner of war in Byzantine lands) (Cairo 1989) pp. 32-48; A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, pp. 390-393.

grade.<sup>265</sup> This Muslim intervention on behalf of their Christian subjects is in accordance with Islamic law and customs.<sup>266</sup>

### Children as prisoners of war

In Byzantine-Muslim warfare, among the innumerable prisoners of war, there were numbers of children taken by both sides. Contemporary sources relate several instances of capturing Muslim children. Evidently, these occurred during the reigns of the emperors Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes, and were part of a clear systematic policy.

The first phase of the policy is narrated by Bar Hebraeus who says that in 959AD./ 348 H “they (i.e. the Byzantines) killed the men who were therein, and made captives of the women and children”.<sup>267</sup> Some years later, during the raid on Aleppo 351 H/ 962, the Byzantines asked the Muslims to surrender 3000 boys and girls, in return of safe conduct (Amān) for the citizens, who refused such an unthinkable offer.<sup>268</sup> Once the Byzantines had control over the city they carried away more than 10,000 boys and girls.<sup>269</sup>

In 969AD. /358 H emperor Nicephoros Phokas, in his campaign against Syria, went out on his way to capture more Muslim children, as Ibn al-Athīr narrates, “He

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<sup>265</sup> - Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-ishrāf*, p. 178.

<sup>266</sup> -In the Muslim realm non-Muslims were not allowed to carry weapons or to fight. However, Muslims were obliged to protect their non-Muslim subjects. In the early waves of Muslim victories in Syria in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when the Muslim army had to withdraw and evacuate some villages, they returned the poll tax Jizya, which they had collected from the local Christians in these places, inasmuch as the Arabs were no longer able to protect them. However, there are some differences between the Muslims' four main legal doctrines (madhahb), on the issue of equality between Muslim and non-Muslim in the money for ransom and blood money. Similarly, Caliph al-M'utāsīm refused to compare the Muslim prisoners of war with the Byzantines on an equal basis saying, “Our lord doth not justify our comparing the Muslim with a Rohomaye (Byzantine).” Al-Māwardī, *al-aḥkām al-sultāniyya*, (Cairo 1973) p. 143; Michel le Syrien, III, p. 102; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 139. C.f. A. Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-Musulmans en pays d'Islam*, (Beirut 1958) pp. 116-118.

<sup>267</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 166. On the struggle in northern Syria, see A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, 1, pp. 363-364.

<sup>268</sup> - Ibn Miskawayh, *Kitāb tajārib al-umam*, 6, p. 211.

<sup>269</sup> - Al-Ḥamadānī, *Takmilat tarīkh al-Ṭabarī*, p. 181; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, p. 3; Ibn al- 'Adīm, p. 80; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 168.

took only the boys, girls and youths”.<sup>270</sup> Bar Hebraeus says, “One hundred thousand prisoners, youths and maidens, were counted with him, for he took neither old man nor old woman; of these some he killed and some of them left”.<sup>271</sup> Byzantine sources, substantially Tzimiskes himself, confirm this narrative. In his letter to the Armenian King Ashot III, he says "and our troops took many captives, both children and girls".<sup>272</sup>

One can find more explanations in the narratives in Islamic polemical writings. Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār accused the Byzantines of being ruthless in capturing Muslim children, and castrating them in large numbers.<sup>273</sup> His narrative is extremely important; he says:

They (the Byzantines) omit the circumcision but they castrate the children. When they capture some Muslims they single out their children and castrate large numbers of them and without giving them any medical care, so several have died. They pretend to be merciful and pitiful. In the first days of Islam they used to keep the (the Muslim) prisoners of war to use them for exchange of prisoners, as they know the power of Islam and their own weakness.<sup>274</sup>

Similarly, al-Jāḥiẓ, relates the bitterness and hatred of the Muslim eunuchs against Byzantium in his time:

The asceticism of the eunuchs is invading the *Rum*, and volunteering for Jihad in *Adhinah* and *Ṭarsūs*, inasmuch as they are the ones who castrated

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<sup>270</sup> - Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, p. 34.

<sup>271</sup> -Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 172; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab*, p. 93 (mentions the same narrative and the same number); Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī neither mentions such a large number nor makes any allusion to a Byzantine policy of capturing Muslim children. At the same time he does speak about “uncountable number of Muslim prisoners of war”, Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *PO* 18, p. 816.

<sup>272</sup> - Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia*, p. 29.

<sup>273</sup> -Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 168.

<sup>274</sup> - Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 168



them. So the wise men think that is because they (the *Rum*) had castrated them, so they are furious with them and very keen to take revenge.<sup>275</sup>

He even declares that every castration in the world is from the Byzantines, who claim to be merciful, but commit this ruthless act, against the spirit of Christianity.<sup>276</sup>

Al-Muqaddasī relates that Muslims in their raids against Byzantium, used to storm churches looking for eunuchs, who were brought to the flourishing slave markets in the Muslim world. This narrative seems *prima facie* to be a confusing, but examining it in context with other narratives allows us to reconstruct the fate of Muslim children.

As we have seen, the Byzantine armies, particularly in the tenth century, captured great numbers of Muslim children and castrated some of them. The question which needs an answer is, what happened to these children aftermath? Obviously, the majority of them simply disappeared into obscurity. Some of these children were freed in exchanges of prisoners of war between Byzantines and Muslims. Among this particular group there were some eunuchs, who had deep hatred against Byzantium, according to the narrative of al-Jāḥiẓ. The second group of eunuchs whom al-Muqaddasi refers to were saved in the Muslim raids and soon found their way into the slave market and hence into the Muslim harems, though it is not clear that all of this last group were of Muslim origins.

The third group, the details of whose lives are largely obscure, includes those who were baptised and assimilated into Byzantine society. Fortunately, there is one

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<sup>275</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, 1, p. 80.

<sup>276</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, 1, p. 99.

less obscure example, Samonas, who was "an Agarene by birth", and one of the higher officials in the court of Leo VI.<sup>277</sup>

Samonas appears in the Byzantine sources several times; his name was frequently connected with Byzantine-Muslim relations. The emperor tried to reconcile with rebel Andronicus Ducas, who was in Baghdad, by means of secret message hidden in a candle and carried by a Muslim prisoner whom the emperor befriended. Samonas warned the Muslim prisoner that he was carrying "Your country's ruin" and advised him to deliver the secret message instead to the Muslim vizier.<sup>278</sup>

On another occasion Samonas tried to escape to Syria, to join the Muslim side. The emperor Leo VI ordered him to be returned, investigated the whole story, and finally punished Samonas with house arrest for four months.<sup>279</sup>

One may agree that it is risky, to suggest a clear religious motive for Samonas' sympathy toward the Muslims. There is almost no concrete evidence for this from any of the sources. However, his first attempt to prevent the reconciliation between Leo VI and his rival, Andronicus Ducas, may be explained in the light of the personal hostility between Samonas and the Ducas family, as John Skylitzes states.<sup>280</sup> Yet the connection between his attempt to escape to the Muslims and his efforts to help them, could equally indicate the deep sympathy of the man for his abandoned religion, and even pose more questions about the way in which he converted or was (forced?) converted to Christianity. Furthermore, another narrative of the same contemporary

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<sup>277</sup> -Vita Euthymii, p. 55. C.f., R. Jenkins, 'The flight of Samonas', no. X in idem, *Studies on Byzantine history*, p. 221-222; L. Rydén, 'The portrait of Arab Samonas in Byzantine literature', *Graeco-Arabic*, 3 (1984) 101-108.

<sup>278</sup> - G. Monachus, pp. 867-868. See Jenkins, 'The flight of Samonas', p. 232; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'The revolt of Andronicus Ducas', no. VI in idem, *Studies in the Byzantine political history*.

<sup>279</sup> -John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, p. 184, German trans., Hans Thurn, pp. 220- 221; Theophanes Cont., pp. 369-370; Symeon Magistri, p. 708; Cedrenus, *Compendium historiarum*, II, 264, 270. See R. Jenkins, 'The flight of Samonas'.

<sup>280</sup> - John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, p. 190, German trans., Hans Thurn, p. 227.

Byzantine historian, Skylitzes, states that Samonas' father was a Muslim man living in Melitine, who came to Constantinople in an official delegation to discuss an exchange of prisoners. Unlike the apostate former Muslim emir, the father of Digenes Akrites, who managed to persuade his mother and his kinsmen to convert to Christianity and immigrate to Byzantium,<sup>281</sup> Samonas, in a deeply questionable gesture, persuaded his father to return to Syria and not to convert to Christianity, after the old man, according to Byzantine sources, seeing the luxurious life of his son in the imperial court, had decided to convert to Christianity and stay in Constantinople.<sup>282</sup> Undoubtedly, such a narrative could easily confirm Samonas siding with Muslims, or at least his sympathy towards Islam.

There are still some unanswered questions concerning Samonas. If we accept the hypothesis which portrays him as a child who was brought somehow to Byzantium, where he was castrated and baptised, one may ask, how he recognised his father, after many years? Why did his father particularly come in this embassy? Was it just a coincidence or did the old man wish to see his son there? Was there any previous contact between Samonas and his family? Unfortunately there is no explicit answer in the contemporary sources. He seems to have been captured in his adolescence and somehow to have kept contact with his Muslim family, who knew his rank in the Byzantine court.

In sum, a virtual chronological line goes through of the life of Samonas (circa 900), the narrative of al-Jāhīz, (d. 869 A.D) on the castration of Muslim children in Byzantium and the policy of Nicephoros Phokas (963-969) and John Tzimiskes (969-976), of capturing Muslim children; all these indicate clearly, that systematic

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<sup>281</sup> - Digenes Akrites, pp. 56-58.

<sup>282</sup> - John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, p. 189, German trans., Hans Thurn, p. 226.

Byzantine policy of castrating Muslim children, lasted for almost one century. Yet we do not know exactly the length of this practice.

In contrast, there are some cases of Byzantine children who were carried to Muslim lands, converted and educated as Muslims. The most prominent example this is Leo the Tripoli, a naval admiral, who sacked the city of Thessalonica in 904 / 291H. Leo was born to Christian parents, in Attalia, in Asia Minor, and then a Syrian Muslim fleet from Tripoli captured him. Later he grew up in the house of a rich Muslim called Zurafa. He converted to Islam, and took a substantial part in the Muslim fighting against Byzantium.<sup>283</sup>

### Byzantine slave-women

Since the first military clash between Muslim and Byzantine forces, during the life of Muḥammad himself, Byzantine women were much sought after as booty in the war.<sup>284</sup> Ironically, in the tenth century the Arab poet, in his boasting poem against Byzantines, scoffed at them, saying that their slave-girls were available in large numbers in the Arabic lands, and even became stagnant (in the slave market), because the Arab girls were more charming.<sup>285</sup>

However, it is noteworthy that Islamic law (Shari'ah) allows Muslim men to marry their non-Muslim slave girls or have them as concubines.<sup>286</sup> In the long-lasting

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<sup>283</sup> - John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, p.182, German trans., Hans Thurn, p. 219; Theophanes Cont. p. 366; Cedrenus, *Compendium historiarum*, II, pp. 261-262. See W. Farag, 'Some remarks on Leo of Tripoli's attack on Thessaloniki in 904', *BZ* 82 (1989) pp. 135-136.

<sup>284</sup> - Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muḥammad*, p. 260

<sup>285</sup> - N. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Shi'r al-ṣirā' ma'a al-rūm*, (the poetry of the struggle with Rum), p. 258.

<sup>286</sup> -The Qur'ān explains this clearly: "The Believers must (eventually) win through, Those who humble themselves in their prayers; Who avoid vain talk; Who are active in deeds of charity; Who abstain from sex; Except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess, for (in their case) they are free from blame," 23: 1-6. an other verse it confirms this right with emphasis on the slave girls has to be believers (it does not indicate being Muslims here) "If any of you have not the means wherewith to wed free believing women, they may wed believing girls from among those whom your right hands possess: and Allah hath full knowledge about your faith. Ye are one from another: wed them with the leave of their owners, and give them their dowers, according to what is reasonable: they should be chaste, not lustful, nor

warfare between Byzantium and Muslims, and the frequent Arab raids on Byzantine lands, which occurred almost every year, the number of Byzantine slave-women gradually increased.<sup>287</sup>

In Arabic poetry there are several allusions to these Byzantine slave girls and their increasing number. Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshaī refutes the emperor Nikephoros's schadenfreude over Muslim women in Byzantine captivity. He says:

*You dwell too long on the issue of women's (captivity)*

*While we have a million of yours either as servants or slave girls.*<sup>288</sup>

Al-Mutanabī says in his panegyric on Sayf al-Dawlah:

*Whenever a virgin in their lands dreams*

*She will dream of captivity and a camel*<sup>289</sup>

On another occasion he describes the river fleet of Sayf al-Dawlah

*From braids he twisted ropes over it (the fleet),*

*Out of (wooden?) crosses he built the ships for it.*<sup>290</sup>

It is almost impossible to find accurate statistics of the numbers involved, however many of these girls found their way to the houses of caliphs, emirs and nobles. Some of them soon became *Umm walad* (mother of a child), a situation that gave them the position of concubine and somehow a distinguished role at the court, especially if her son ascended the throne of the caliphs. The Arabic sources give a long list of caliphs and emirs, as well as some of the distinguished men born from

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taking paramours: when they are taken in wedlock, if they fall into shame, their punishment is half that for free women. This (permission) is for those among you who fear sin; but is better for you that ye practise self-restraint. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." 4: 25. See also al-Māwardī, *al-aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>287</sup> -Arabic sources indicate clearly that the Muslims during the first Muslim century considered marriage to slave-girls a vice and a shameful act for a free man, in spite the fact that Muḥammad the prophet himself had married a slave girl sent to him as a present from Egypt. But gradually Arabs later began to marry these concubines, and the offspring of these women became prominent member of the Muslim society, which encouraged others to marry their concubines. Ibn Qutaybah, *Uūn al-akhbār*, 4, p. 8.

<sup>288</sup> -Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shafi'iyyah*, 2, p. 182; German translation, G. Grünebaum, 'Eine poetische Polemik', p. 61, no. 83.

<sup>289</sup> - N. 'Abd al-Rḥmān, *Shi'r al-sirā' ma'a al-rūm*, p. 233.

Greek mothers.<sup>291</sup> Notwithstanding these huge numbers, their effect on Byzantine-Muslim relations and on Muslim attitudes towards Christianity does not seem very effective. Nevertheless, al-Jāhīz points that the large number of Byzantine slave-women who married to Muslim rulers helped to improve the reputation of the Christians among the Muslim laity.<sup>292</sup>

It is well known from the Arabic sources that some of these women (*Umm walad*) had considerable influences on their sons when they became caliphs. The best-known figure is Qabīḥah,<sup>293</sup> a Byzantine slave girl and mother of the caliph al-Mu'tazz. Al-Mas'ūdī narrates that this woman was the main power behind affairs of the state.<sup>294</sup> Yet it is almost impossible to find any connection between her and the caliph's relations with Byzantium, or any kind of sympathy from her towards Christian subjects of the Caliph. Most likely these women, once converted to Islam, engaged only in the daily life of the harem.

Unfortunately, there are only a very few known cases connected with Byzantium, in this context. The prince and poet Abū Firās al-Ḥamadānī, who was a son of a Byzantine woman,<sup>295</sup> was captured in 962AD./351 H and wrote long poems on his experiences in captivity. However, he was treated well; he even called his captors "my uncles".<sup>296</sup> It is more important that the caliph al-Mu'taḍid was

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<sup>290</sup> - N. Abd al-Rḥmān, *Shi'r al-sirā' ma' al-rūm*, p. 232

<sup>291</sup> - E.g. al-Wāḥiq (842-847/ 227-232); al-Musta'in (862-866 / 248-252); al-Mu'tazz (866-869/ 252-255) whose mother was a famous Byzantine slave girl called Qabīḥa; al-Muhtādī (869-870/ 255-256); al-Mu'taḍid (892-902/ 279-289); al-Muqtadir (908-932/ 296-320). See al-Ṭabarī, *passim*; Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, *passim*; al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-khulafā'*, pp. 272, 285, 287, 291, 303, 312; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, 3, p. 271; Ibn Rustah, p. 213.

<sup>292</sup> - Al-Jāhīz, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 16.

<sup>293</sup> - Qabīḥah female Arabic adjective means ugly. She may have been given such an epithet because of her extraordinary beauty, as a traditional custom among Arabs, which has lasted to the present day in some rural areas especially in Egypt.

<sup>294</sup> - Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf*, p. 332; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād*, 2, pp. 121-126.

<sup>295</sup> - Ibn al-Aṭhīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, p. 5.

<sup>296</sup> - Diwān abi Firās, II, 247. See N. 'Abd al-Raḥman, *Shi'r al-ṣirā' ma'a al-rum*, p. 284.

reportedly speaking Greek fluently;<sup>297</sup> most probably he learnt it from his Greek mother and other Greek slave girls in the harem.

The most prominent example of these Byzantine slave-girls is the wife of al-‘Azīz bi Allah, the Fatimid caliph (975-996AD./ 365-386H.). We are informed that this woman was a Byzantine slave woman brought with her family to Egypt, and had taken the position of Umm walad in the caliph’s Harem. She maintained her religion as a Christian Melkite<sup>298</sup> and she had two children (at least so far is known). Surprisingly, her son was al-Ḥākim, the most intolerant ruler in the Islamic history.<sup>299</sup>

It is beyond doubt that, this lady and her daughter Sitt al-Mulk, used their strong influence upon the caliphs to support the Christians; presumably the Melkites were their first priority.<sup>300</sup> As the influence of this woman and her powerful daughter increased, two members of the same family ascended the throne of the Patriarchies of the east, Jerusalem 985AD./ 375 H. and Alexandria 1000AD./ 390H.<sup>301</sup>

However, it is not known exactly how this woman and her family were brought together to Egypt; seemingly they were captured in Muslim naval raids, which brought several Byzantine prisoners of war to Egypt.<sup>302</sup>

Unfortunately, less is known about the Byzantine slave girls who married, or were forced to marry, common Muslims. Most of the sources on both sides give them only scant attention. However, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī narrates that when Byzantine armies stormed al-Maṣīṣah, the Byzantine women deserted their new Muslim men and

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<sup>297</sup> - Al-Ṣābi’, Hilāl, *Rusūsm dār al-khilāfa*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>298</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa’, *Tārīkh*, II: 2, p. 113.

<sup>299</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa’, *Tārīkh*, II; 2, p. 113.

<sup>300</sup> -The Egyptian Coptic writer records bitterly about support for the Melkites, who took some churches from the Copts, Severus b. al-Muqaffa’, *Tārīkh*, II: 2, p. 113.

<sup>301</sup> -Severus b. al-Muqaffa’, *Tārīkh*, II: 2, p. 113; Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, 164-197; S. Muḥamūd, *Ahl al-Zimmah fi Miṣr*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>302</sup> - See for example al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, I, p. 282.

chosen to go back to their previous life and religion. Some of these women took their children with them to grow up as Christians among the Byzantines.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> - Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, III, pp. 526-527.



## Chapter Four

### Byzantine polemic against Islam: A historical view

It is unquestionable that Byzantine anti-Muslim polemic was born and elaborated in the former Byzantine provinces in Syria and Egypt, where the seventh-century Christian thinkers, such as Sophronios of Jerusalem and Anastasios of Sinai, had to face and explain the phenomenon of Islam, which accompanied the rapid and decisive victories of the Muslim armies. Obviously, as I have shown in chapter 1, they were not fully acquainted with Islam or its teachings. The main task for them certainly was not facing the Islamic polemic, which was *in ovo* at that early stage, but rather to explain the Islamic victories in the light of the Bible. In sum, they did not face Islamic debates, only the *de facto* challenge of the stunning Muslim triumphs.

The Melkite Arabic writers around the monastery of St. Saba began as early as the eighth century to examine Islam. The monks of that monastery were, one may presume, a bridge between Byzantium and Islam. While being subjects of the new Muslim authorities and facing daily challenges on the ground of faith, they kept to a certain degree some form of warm relations with the mother church in Constantinople. Presumably, the knowledge, as well as rumours, of Islam and Muslims found their way to Constantinople, a long time before any polemical work appeared in Byzantium. Consequently, the pioneering Byzantine polemical works, which were written in Greek and produced in lands under Byzantine control, began to appear slowly, imitating the Christian Melkite Arabs, John of Damascus and his disciple Theodore Abū Qurah.

Byzantine polemic against Islam diversified in several forms, from fully dedicated treatises, to mere pages or allusions within historical works, or just

desultory insinuation within a few hagiographical texts. While the previous categories were mostly written for a Christian reader, there are some alleged letters reportedly sent to the Muslim side. It is noteworthy that each of these works has its own unique features, orientation, aims and style. But the question is, can we divorce this war of words from the ongoing Byzantine-Muslim military and political relations? The answer would imply a new look and examination of each work, the authors and their connection, if any, with the warfare between the two antagonistic worlds.

In the period of this thesis (843-1025), there are relatively a few polemical works fully dedicated against Islam. The majority devoted parts of their works or in a few cases, just made some allusions against Islam incidentally within other works.

### **Niketas of Byzantium**

The main work against Islam is a lengthy treatise attributed to an almost unknown author called Niketas of Byzantium. Undoubtedly, it is the most accurate and comprehensive work concerning Islam in the Byzantine world. Ironically, apart from the relatively wide attention which his treatise received from modern scholars, almost nothing is known about him. Who was Niketas of Byzantium? It is not an easy question, and no evidence seems to be available about the man and his life. Niketas himself said nothing about his life nor made any chronological allusion<sup>1</sup> that would help to identify the historical background of the text. It is an immense task, however, to examine the life of Niketas, in the light of the lack of any relevant information on his life. A Ph.D. thesis has been devoted entirely to Niketas and his works. In spite of the intensive discussion of J. M. Demetriades in his thesis, *Nicetas of Byzantium and his encounter with Islam*, he has almost nothing to say about the life of Niketas. Some other modern scholars had focused some light on Niketas, but none of them

had genuine additions to say about the personality of Niketas, just hypotheses and ideas without the support of any historical sources on Niketas.<sup>2</sup> Most of the modern scholars, however, tend to put Niketas in the ninth century, as a contemporary and disciple of Photios, on the ground of some linguistic similarity between the two writers, even though he never mentioned Photios by name.<sup>3</sup> It is well known however, that parts of Niketas' treatise against Islam were translated into Latin and used by Hugh Etherianus (or Etriano, a Pisan) in the twelfth century.<sup>4</sup>

Niketas' works against Islam consisted of two parts, his lengthy treatise (*anatrophe*) against Islam, and two letters reportedly sent to Muslims to reply to and refute some previous unknown Muslim letters. He began his treatise with a panegyric of the pious Christian emperor (Michael III), followed by an inaccurate table of contents, and exposition of the Christian faith, followed by his arguments against selected chapters of the Qur'ān, as well as twelve general points.<sup>5</sup>

The other part of the work is two letters<sup>6</sup>, was written in reply to alleged Muslim letters sent to the emperor Michael III by an unknown Muslim. J. Demetriades argues convincingly that the writer of the *anatrophe*, supposed to be Niketas of Byzantium, was not the same writer of the two replies to the alleged Muslim letters. He built his hypothesis on the ground of the difference of the style

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<sup>1</sup> - Niketas did mention the name of the emperor Michael III, as if he were his sponsor, but the kind of language used to describe the pious Christian sovereign, hardly could be applied to such person like Michael.

<sup>2</sup> -A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 110- 127; H. Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur*, p. 530.

<sup>3</sup> - A. Mai, *Novae patrum bibliotheca*, 10 vols. (Rome 1842-1905) 4, pp. 321-322, cited in *PG*, 105, cols. 666-670, English translation, J. Demetriades, *Niceta of Byzantiums*, appendix I, pp. 151-158; K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur*, I, pp. 49-50, 79, 90; W. Eichner, 'Die Nachrichten über Islam bei den Byzantinern', *Der Islam*, XXIII (1936) p. 138; H. Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur*, p. 530; A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 110-112.

<sup>4</sup> -J. Hergenröther, *Photius, Patriarch von Constantinopel*, II, p. 645; Cited by J. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 5

<sup>5</sup> - Niketas, *Refut.* cols. 669-805. See the general analysis of J. Demetriades, *Niketas of Byzantium*, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> - Niketas, *Refut*, cols. 807-842.

and tone between the two works, as well as the Christian terminology used in both texts, which was considerably dissimilar.<sup>7</sup>

As with most of the alleged dialogues and letters between Muslims and Christians, there are several reasons to be sceptical about the authenticity of these alleged Muslim letters, as well as their Byzantine reply. Firstly, there is no other historical evidence whatsoever to support the existence of such letters. On the other hand, the fragments of two letters (we do not have even their full text) are poor in their theological arguments, compared with any other contemporary well-known Muslim treatises. They simply reflect knowledge of a Christian rather than a Muslim theologian. Furthermore, the alleged passage of a second Muslim letter that is “it is lawful and permissible to kill anyone believing that God has a partner who is equal in power (i.e. the Christians, precisely the Byzantines)”<sup>8</sup> could hardly be accepted as a part of the polemical letter sent from Muslim side<sup>9</sup>. Such a passage was written to give the opportunity to the Christian counterpart to refute the Muslim letter, as it occurred in other instances.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> -J. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, pp. 104-116. The same theory had been supported by other scholars see C. Güterbock, *Der Islam im Lichte der byzantinischen Polemik*, p. 32;

<sup>8</sup> - Niketas, *Refut. col.*, 836 53-47; 837, 1. See J. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*. p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> - Compare with the soft tone of the letter of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd to the emperor Constantine VI; as well as the letter attributed to the caliph ‘Umar II which was sent the emperor Leo III.

<sup>10</sup> -The alleged dialogue between al-Hāshimī (the Muslim) and ‘Abd al-Masīh b. Ishāq al-Kindī (the Christian) in which the Muslim letter seems to be written to promote Islam, but instead gave more hints and chances for the Christian reply. Al-Kindī and Hāshimī, *Risālat ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Ismā‘īl al-Hāshimī ilā ‘Abd al-Masīh b. Ishāq al-Kindī yad ‘ūhu bihā ila al-Islām, wa risālat ‘Abd al-Masīh ilā al-Hāshimī yaruddu bihā ‘alayhi wa yad ‘ūhu ilā al-Nasrāniyyah*, (the message of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Ismā‘īl al-Hāshimī to ‘Abd al-Masīh bin Ishāq al-Kindī, in which he invites him to embrace Islam and the response ‘Abd al-Masīh, to al-Hāshimī, inviting him to embrace the Christianity) ed. Bible Lands Missions, Aid Society (London 1912).

Firstly Niketas, as J. M. Demetriades pointed out, had omitted the first Sura (chapter) of the Qur'ān.<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that this Sura and the alleged suspicion about its authenticity played a part in the internal polemic within the Muslim realm.<sup>12</sup>

Niketas certainly had the widest and most accurate knowledge of Islam in Byzantium. He was very acquainted with the whole text of the Qur'ān. Several modern scholars had pointed out the possibility of the existence of a Greek translation of the Muslim sacred book, which was available to Niketas.<sup>13</sup> Presumably this translation, if it does exist, was made by a certain Christian Arab, among the huge number of the Christian Arabs, especially the Melkite, who fled the Muslim authority and escaped to Byzantium. Alternatively and improbably, our unknown translator could be a Muslim who converted to Christianity and stayed in Byzantium, and used his knowledge of the Qur'ān. Niketas did refer to some former Muslims who converted and stayed in Byzantium, who provided him with some knowledge on the Muslims' life and practices, especially the pilgrimage at Mecca. Yet his account is certainly far from the truth, or deliberately altered by Niketas to give him a chance to mock against the Muslim creed.<sup>14</sup> In spite of the claims of Niketas of having a

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<sup>11</sup> - J. M. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 20, note 1.

<sup>12</sup> -Al-Baqlānī, the first Muslim theologian who visited Constantinople in the tenth century, remarkably devoted most of his works to defend the Qur'ān. He dealt with the claims against authenticity of some short Suras of the Qur'ān, though he did not mention Niketas of Byzantium, but he challenged the same theory of Niketas. See Chapter 6.

<sup>13</sup> - A. Houry, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>14</sup> -Niketas says "Among the number of idols, God especially favours two of them, the Ṣafā and Marwa" and "he orders them to walk around this most contaminated building, and as one of them, converted to Christianity, says, there is in the centre of the building a sitting idol" and Muslims "bow down their heads and raise one of their hands up, keeping the other down, and run around until they fall down from dizziness" Niketas, *Refut*, cols. 72o C. Partial English trans. J. M. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 35. C.f. A. Houry, *Les théologiens byzantins*, p. 144; W. Eichner, 'Die Nachrichten über den Islam bei den Byzantinern', p. 57. While both Houry and Demetriades have referred briefly to the misinterpretation of Niketas' text, Eichner relatively elaborated, yet not sufficient, in explaining the real Muslim practice.

The ṣafa and Marwa, (which I have seen) are two small hills by the Meccan shrine, and Muslim who visit the Holy Mosque (either for Hajj or 'Umrah), should trot between these two hills seven times, in the memory of Hājar, who (according to the Muslim tradition) came to this barren spot of Arabia with her son Ishmael, and after running out of water, ran between these hills several times until a water well (known as Zamzam) miraculously emanated from under her son feet. However it is reported that the pre-Islamic Arabs used to erect two statues on these hills and pray to them. This

converted Muslim as a source for his knowledge, his account of the Muslim pilgrims' practices at Mecca<sup>15</sup> obviously was built on the notion of John of Damascus who dealt with issue and tried to explain the Muslim Ḥajj.

On the other hand, we have a unique narrative of al-Jāḥiẓ,<sup>16</sup> speaking of a certain Christian Arab Yūnis b. Hārūn, who wrote an anti-Muslim book under the patronage of the king of Rūm (i.e. the Byzantine emperor), presumably after his immigration or escape to Byzantium. This narrative comes in the zoology encyclopaedia of al-Jāḥiẓ, which was written sometime before 847AD./ 233H.<sup>17</sup> Significantly, it is a precise date, which lies just before the supposed date of the writings of Niketas' polemical work. This unique narrative, however, has had almost no attention from modern scholars. G. Graf omitted that man in his scholarly encyclopaedia *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, as did L. Cheikho, in his encyclopaedia on the Christian Arab writers and viziers in the realm of Islam.<sup>18</sup> Likewise A. Khoury in his numerous works on the Byzantine polemic against Islam<sup>19</sup>

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may have reached Byzantium through its contacts with those Arabs before Islam. The other practice (Ṭawāf), which was mentioned in Niketas' treatise, is seven rounds of walking around the Ka'ba, which is a cubic building in the middle of the Meccan mosque. The Muslim visitors should circumambulate it seven times, and following the lead of their prophet they were asked to kiss the black stone, which is fixed inside one of its external corners, and if not able to do because of the crowd they may raise their hands for greetings. Qur'ān, 2: 158; 22:29. cf. Genesis, 21: 14-20. There is enormous literature on this subject. On the pilgrimage in Islam, see Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bāri fī sharḥ saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3, (book of the pilgrimage) pp. 482-759. See R. Firestone, 'Abraham's journey to Mecca in Islamic exegesis: A form-critical study of a tradition', *SI* 76 (1992) pp. 5-24

<sup>15</sup> - According to the Qur'ān the non-Muslims (literary polytheists) are not allowed to enter of Muslim holy city of Mecca. "O ye who believe! Truly the polytheists are unclean; so let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred mosque" 9:28. This fact seemingly created a huge gap in the Christian knowledge of the Muslim Ḥajj, and equally gave a chance to the Christian polemicists (Certainly those who lived outside the realm of Islam) to deal with this practice with a unique mixed of mala fide and ignorance. See A. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine*, pp. 275-281; On the repercussion of this practice in the Latin west, see B. Septimus, 'Petrus Alfonsi on the Cult at Mecca', *Speculum*, 56 (1981) pp. 517-533.

<sup>16</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, 4, p. 143. "ويونس بن هارون كان قد كتب كتابا لملك الروم في مآلئ العرب وعيوب الإسلام. بزعمه، "Yūnis b. Hārūn has written a book for the king of Rūm, on the imperfection of the Arabs and the blemishes of Islam, in his claims"

<sup>17</sup> - C. Pellat, *The life and works of Jāḥiẓ*, English trans. from French, D. M. Hawke (London 1969) p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> - L. Cheikho, *Wuzarā' al-Naṣṣāniyya wa kutābihā fī al-Islām*, 622-1517 (Bierut 1987).

<sup>19</sup> - See the bibliography.

did not make use of this book of al-Jāḥiẓ. Similarly, this narrative escaped the notice of R. Caspar who published (with others) a comprehensive bibliography of the Muslims-Christian dialogues.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, there is no solid ground for doubts on this narrative, as al-Jāḥiẓ, was certainly an authority and well known to have had a special awareness of the movement of al-Shu‘ūbiyya (anti Arabic movement), among the non-Arabs, either Muslims or not, which was propagated during his lifetime.

Unfortunately there is no sufficient information on the identity of that Christian writer who worked for the Byzantine service. One may hypothesis that, however, he was one of those unknown bilinguals who travelled, willingly or obligatorily, between the two hostile worlds and acquired knowledge of both languages<sup>21</sup>, and that man translated the Muslim sacred book into Greek. If, indeed, this Yūnis b. Hārūn did translate the Qur’ān, one may presume that on that translation Niketas built his polemic against Islam. However, the Greek language was gradually in decline among the Christian communities in Palestine in the middle of the tenth century.<sup>22</sup> It seems that, Yūnis b. Hārūn was not originally an Arab, inasmuch as he dedicated part of his work against the Arabs.

If the narrative of al-Jāḥiẓ, is to be trusted, it indicates clearly a policy of Byzantine empire to encourage or sponsor some Christian Arabs who escaped from the Muslim lands, or even, yet on a smaller scale, the Muslims who immigrated or were forced to immigrate, and converted to Christianity, to use their previous knowledge of Islam in the service of Byzantium. More important this alleged

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<sup>20</sup>- R. Caspar et al., ‘Bibliographie du dialogue Islamo- Chrétien’, *Islamochristiana*, 1 (1975) pp. 125-181.

<sup>21</sup> - Among those bilingual Christian Arabs who emigrated from the Muslim lands, we know Qisṭa b. Lūqa, a Melkite writer, who speaks both Arabic and Greek fluently, and immigrated to Armenia. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, p 295.

<sup>22</sup> - On the Greek language in the Muslim lands see S. H. Griffith, ‘From Aramaic to Arabic: the languages of Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and early Islamic period’, *DOP*, 51 (1997) pp. 11-31; D. Gutass, *Greek thought, Arabic culture: the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad and early ‘Abbāsīd society (2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries)* (London 1998) pp. 11-16.

Christian Arab theologian could be the main source of Niketas and other Byzantine theologians in their polemics against Islam.

On the other hand, Niketas made some obvious mistakes in his reading of the Qur'ān. Evidently these were caused by ignorance of the Arabic language. The most common mistake is his conception of the Arabic word al-Ṣamad,<sup>23</sup> by which he saw the Muslim's God as a solid material.<sup>24</sup> Another Arabic word, which he misinterpreted as well, is the word 'alaq, which he interpreted as leech, and consequently attributed the strange notion of the creation of the human being from a leech to the Qur'ān.<sup>25</sup> There are, yet more mistakes and misunderstandings, some of which were pointed out by modern works.

Once more, Niketas felt free to alter Qur'ānic text " O ye who believe! Eat of what is on earth lawful and good; and do not follow the footsteps of the Satan for he is to you an avowed enemy"<sup>26</sup>, to a different version in which he assumes that the Qur'ān allows Muslim to eat whatever is on the earth, even dogs or wolves.<sup>27</sup> Notwithstanding, this sharp alteration and the clear distortion of the Qur'ānic verses, the western scholars who dealt with that text failed to recognise this deformation in their writings. Both Migne and J. Demetriades did refer to exact Qur'ānic verse, (2:168), while A. Khoury referred to other one (2: 170, 173). But ironically none of

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<sup>23</sup> - (الصمد) Ibn Kathīr discussed all the possible meanings of this word. The word means the master to whom people seek in tribulation, and it did appear in the pre-Islamic poetry (the standard criterion of the Arabic language) by this meaning several times. While a few Arabic grammarians explain that word as who does not eat or drink). Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, CD-Rom ed. (Cairo 1995).

<sup>24</sup> - Niketas, 785; for a full discussion on that point see D. Sahas, 'Holosphyros? A Byzantine perception of the God of Muhammad' in Y. Y. Haddad, W. Z. Haddad, (eds.) *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (University Press of Florida 1995) pp.109-125; J. Meyendorff, 'Byzantine views of Islam', p. 122.

<sup>25</sup> - " Proclaim (or read) in the name of thy Lord and cherisher, who created the man, out of a (mere) congealed blood ('alaq)", 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's translation. In the latest translation edited by the presidency of the Islamic researches, iftā', Call and guide (KSA 1990) " Proclaim (or read) in the name of thy Lord and cherisher, who created the man, out of leech-like clot ('alaq)" Qur'ān, 96: 1-2

<sup>26</sup> -Qur'ān, 2: 186;

<sup>27</sup> - Niketas, *Refut*, cols. 720-721, partial English trans. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 36; cf. A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, p. 144.



them did notice, the sharp misrepresentation of the text, and they just referred their readers to the number (not the text) of Qur'ānic verses without comment, as if it is the same text of Niketas.

On an other occasion the alteration of the Qur'ānic text, ironically was not made by Niketas the Byzantine author, but by J. Demetriades the modern researcher, (or at least the translator of the Qur'ān, on whom he depended) this requires a short discussion. Verses 5:46, speak on Jesus and his book, (al-Injīl) which is the guidance and light of those who fear Allah. “..and in their footsteps We sent Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah”. While the translation of Demetriades gives to the text another, different purpose and completely alters it. It says: “ Jesus, the son of Mary, is the fulfilment of all the previous prophets and of law and he is the bearer of Gospel, where there is guidance, light and righteousness for mankind”<sup>28</sup>. The Arabic word المتقين (those who fear Allah), was altered to *mankind* in Demetriades' translation, and he alluded to it as if it was Niketas', while the latter had translated it perfectly right.<sup>29</sup>

To sum up, Niketas followed, yet to a larger scale, the lead of John of Damascus. He had the same mistakes in his understanding of some Islamic rites, especially the pilgrimage, and its practices in Mecca. Yet, he proved to have wider and relatively more accurate knowledge of the Qur'ān, than any other Byzantine author. In the light of his several mistakes and misunderstandings, it is implausible to suppose that Niketas himself knew the Arabic language fluently.<sup>30</sup> It is more likely he had access to a Greek translation, ostensibly made by a certain Christian Arab, or at

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<sup>28</sup> - Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 41.

<sup>29</sup> - Niketas, *Refut.* col. 737, B. (εἰς ὁδήγησιν καὶ ἐπαγγελίαν τοῖς φοβουμένοις)

best a new convert to Christianity, among the thousands who were imported into Byzantine lands in the ninth and tenth century.

Still yet, as one may suggest, there are some sceptical as well as unanswered questions regarding Niketas. If, indeed, we accept the common and widely established theory of putting Niketas sometime in the ninth century, we have some questions to answer. Why did Byzantine sources pay him no heed, or at least make substantial use of his rich work against Islam, the traditional enemy of Byzantium? The only exception however is the Byzantine theologian Euthymios Zigabinos who made limited use of Niketas work, yet did not mention Niketas by name, and equally he could have used some common sources which Niketas himself had used as well.<sup>31</sup>

Anna Comnena the imperial princess seems not to have seen his work at all,<sup>32</sup> remarkably her discussions on Islam followed systematically the traditional pattern of Byzantine polemic, significantly without help from Niketas' work, which cast some doubts on the authenticity of Niketas' work, or on the theory which put him in the ninth century, or at least on the availability of his work in Byzantium, even in the imperial court. Furthermore, when the emperor John Kantakouzenos (1347-1354) needed to study the Qur'ān, he used a Greek translation made from a Latin translation.<sup>33</sup> More important his successor Manuel II Palaiologos (1391-1425) did not

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<sup>30</sup> - This against the notion of A. Khoury, who hypothesises that Niketas knew Arabic fluently, and he was able to translate himself the Qur'ānic verses, see A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, p. 120.

<sup>31</sup> - A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, p. 236.

<sup>32</sup> - Anna dealt with Islam only in short points over her work, in which she was clearly far from any real knowledge of Islam, as she made Muslim worships Muḥammad, and she summarised the traditional Byzantine views on Islam and Muslim rites in Mecca, following the lead of John of Damascus and other later Byzantine theologians. Anna Comnena, *Aléxiad*, ed. B. Leib, II:6, p. 81<sub>12-18</sub> ; liv.10, p. 208, English trans. E.R.A. Sewter, p. 212, 310

<sup>33</sup> -J. Meyendorff, 'Byzantine views of Islam', p. 123; J. Pelikan, *The spirit of the eastern Christendom*, p. 229.

mention Niketas at all and only referred to the emperor John Kantakouzenos, even hinted to the lack of polemical works against Islam.<sup>34</sup>

On the Muslim side, we have only one Muslim theologian who visited Constantinople in the tenth century and reportedly debated with the Byzantine clergy. Very significantly, al-Bāqillānī devoted most of his works defending the Qur'ān. One may wonder if he ever had discussions in Constantinople that would certainly be reflected in his lengthy treatises. Furthermore, one would expect that the Byzantine clergy who debated with him, would have made use of Niketas' work. Notwithstanding, as I will show in the next chapter, there were some similarities between his works and that of Niketas, but the similarities are too limited to indicate al-Bāqillānī's awareness of Niketas work.<sup>35</sup> These facts, on Byzantine and Muslim side as well, cast more doubts on the authenticity of Niketas' work as a ninth-tenth century Byzantine polemic.

### **Polemical passages within the historical works**

While a few Byzantine theologians, like Niketas of Byzantium dedicated special works entirely against Islam, others paid only scant attention to the phenomenon of Islam within their historical works. The polemical section inserted by Theophanes the Confessor, in his *Chronographia*, concerning the origin of Muḥammad and some short polemical notices, in which he dealt very briefly with the Muslim notion of paradise and Muslim sexual life,<sup>36</sup> had become a cornerstone and tradition in Byzantine historiography. Henceforth, it was copied and reproduced by several Byzantine writers, with slightly varying changes and additions.

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<sup>34</sup> - Manuel II Palaiologus, *Dialoge mit einem Muslim*, ed. with parallel German trans. Karl Förstel (Altenberge 1993) p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> - For a detailed study of al-Bāqillānī's works see next chapter, pp. 281-292.

<sup>36</sup> - Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, pp. 333-334, trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, pp. 464-465.

The first and most reliable reproduction of Theophanes work was the work of George Monachos Hamartolos, yet reworked with much anger, fierce and vehement language. George Monachos used both works of Theophanes, John of Damascus and the patriarch Germanos,<sup>37</sup> to formulate his polemic against Islam. First, he dealt with the life and origin of Muḥammad, his marriage to a rich widow Χαδιγᾶ (Khadija), and his journeys to Palestine in which he came across the Christian and Jewish scriptures.<sup>38</sup> On the revelation to Muḥammad, George narrates the traditional Christian notion of the alleged epilepsy of Muḥammad<sup>39</sup> and the intervention of a false Christian (Arian) monk to interpret this illness as the effect of the divine revelation brought to Muḥammad by the angel Gabriel.<sup>40</sup> George soon turns to the favourite themes of the Byzantine polemic; I mean the Muslim notion of the future life in paradise<sup>41</sup> and Muslim sexual life, which he copied almost verbatim from his predecessors, adding only his vehement language.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> -Germanos, *Ep. ad Thomam episcopum Claudiopoleos*, PG 98, 168 A-D. English trans. J. Mendham, *The seventh Ecumenical council* (London 1849) pp. 230-232. C.f. R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 103-107.

<sup>38</sup> -George Monachos, *Chronicon*, II, pp. 697-698; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, p. 334 4-5, trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, p. 464; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>39</sup> - According to Muslim traditions, Muḥammad used to receive the divine revelation at different times and in different circumstances. Mostly when the angel Gabriel came to Muḥammad, the latter used to have some kind of coma, and sweats heavily, so the attendants hasten to cover him for a while. Usually, after a few minutes, he was restored to his consciousness and told his followers what had been revealed to him. On some other occasions Muḥammad reportedly received the revelation while being asleep, or fully conscious riding his camel in one particular case. Obviously the Christian theologians did pay much attention to this case and most of the Byzantine polemicists did use that in their works. Surprisingly in Western Europe, at the end of the eleventh century, alluded to this theory. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawyyiah* (The life of Muḥammad), ed. M. ‘Abd al-Wāhid (Beirut 1986) 1, pp. 421-425; Guibert de Nogent, *The deeds of God through the Franks*, English trans. R. Levine (Woodbridge 1997) pp. 32-33 (Guibert indicated that he did not find any written works about Muḥammad and Islam, and his knowledge derived from the oral traditions in his time)

<sup>40</sup> - George Monachos, *Chronicon*, II, pp. 698-699; John of Damascus, PG 94, cols. 764-773, English trans. D. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 133; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, p. 333, trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, p. 464; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, pp. 78-97. See A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 180-182.

<sup>41</sup> - The Qur’ānic reference to the future life in paradise, in which those who have been rewarded the eternal life in paradise will enjoy a kind of corporeal life, attracted the attention of Christian polemicists. For a full discussion see *Infra*, chapter 6.

<sup>42</sup> - George Monachos, *Chronicon*, II, pp. 702-708. C.f. John of Damascus, PG 94, col. 764. English trans. D. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, pp. 134-141; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, pp. 333-

Similarly, Symeon the Logothete (chronicle of Leo Grammatikos),<sup>43</sup> known also as Theodore Melitene (X century),<sup>44</sup> replicated the very same text of Theophanes with a less substantial contribution, only an apocryphal Byzantine narrative on an alleged meeting between Muḥammad and the emperor Heraclius, in which Muḥammad asked for a piece of land to occupy and to live on.<sup>45</sup> Otherwise, Symeon or the writer of the text just copied Theophanes.<sup>46</sup>

It is noteworthy that, however, the very same collective text, of John of Damascus, patriarch Germanos, and Theophanes, was used later in Byzantium in the twelfth century by the monk Euthymius Zygabenus who made substantial use of it, as well as limited use of the text of Niketas of Byzantium.<sup>47</sup>

#### **Missions to Muslims: Photios and his mission to the Abbasid court:**

The embassies, which crossed the borders between Byzantium and Muslims to discuss the issues of war and peace between the two antagonists, were at the same time an intellectual channel of communications between the two states, civilisations and societies. Remarkably, the Byzantine delegates were, as M. Canard pointed out, from the elite of the Byzantine intellectual class.<sup>48</sup> However in the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, some prominent Byzantines went to the 'Abbasid capital in Baghdad (or Sāmarrā'). Among those members, we have Photios, his disciple Constantine (the apostle of the Slavs), St. Demetrianos of Cyprus, Leo Choerosphaktes. Sometime earlier, the famous scholar Leo the Mathematician had attracted the attention of the caliph al-Ma'mūn, through one of his students who was

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334, trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, p. 465; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, pp. 78-79. See A. Houry, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 180-182.

<sup>43</sup> - Chronicle of Leo Grammatikos, CSHB (Bonn 1842) pp. 152-154.

<sup>44</sup> - Ed. L. Tafel, (Munich 1859) pp. 105-106.

<sup>45</sup> - This story appeared also in Zonaras, *Epitomae historiarum*, pp. 214-216.

<sup>46</sup> - R. Caspar et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien' *Islamochristiana*, 2 (1976) p. 195.

<sup>47</sup> - Euthymius Zygabenus, *PG* 130, 1332-1360. See A. Houry, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 240-241.

<sup>48</sup> - M. Canard, 'Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes', p. 41.

a prisoner of war in Baghdad, and allegedly surpassed all the Arabic scholars. So the caliph urged the emperor to send Leo to Baghdad.<sup>49</sup>

It is almost certain that, none of those high ranking Byzantine ambassadors had ever any chance to debate in the 'Abbasid capital. Presumably, they were under constant supervision from the Muslim authorities. The only known exception to this is the alleged trip of the Constantine the apostle of the Slavs.

As for Photios, the only evidence that he had been sent as ambassador to the 'Abbasid court is an ambiguous hint in his letter to his brother Tarasios,<sup>50</sup> in which he says "After our appointment as ambassador to Assyria had been confirmed by the assent of the embassy and approved by the emperor".<sup>51</sup> This tiny allusion raises a number of unanswered questions. First of all, what did he mean by *Assyria*? Was that the 'Abbasid capital in Baghdad? If such is the case it would be an interesting opportunity for a great Byzantine scholar to meet his match at the 'Abbasid court. Furthermore, one would expect some Byzantine narratives about such meetings between leading scholars in the east and west, or at least, Photios himself would find it a unique chance to face Muslims and debate with them, and subsequently to write about his new experience. Unfortunately, none of this happened and not a single word (as far as I know) confirms or alludes to such trip.

Interestingly, Hemmerdinger suggests that Photios, in his alleged trip, had access to the great 'Abbasid library in Baghdad, where he was able to read some books, which were forbidden in Constantinople at this time.<sup>52</sup> Both F. Dvornik, and P. Lemerle vigorously criticized this theory. The first criticised it, depending on the fact

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<sup>49</sup>- For a summary and analysis of all Byzantine sources concerning the story of Leo the mathematician and the caliph al-Ma'mūn. See P. Lemerle, *Byzantine humanism*, pp. 173-177.

<sup>50</sup> - The authenticity of this letter is questioned by some Byzantinists, who believe that it is fictitious. C.f., Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur*, pp. 512, 519; F. Halkin, 'La date de composition de la 'Bibliothèque', *AB* 83 (1963) p. 417.

<sup>51</sup> - Photios, *Library*, I., p 15; P. Magdalino, 'The road to Baghdad,' p. 202

that the 'Abbasid political capital was several miles north of Baghdad, in Samarrā'; it would be impossible for a Byzantine ambassador to leave the capital for several days. Furthermore he argues that, such heretical books were already available within the boundaries of Byzantium.<sup>53</sup> P. Lemerle, even went further to suggest that that the whole embassy had never gone out to Baghdad, and if so, surely without Photios.<sup>54</sup> To sum up, there is not any sufficient information about Photios' time in Baghdad, neither in Byzantine sources, including Photios himself, nor in Muslim sources. It seems safe to assume, even if we accept the authenticity of the trip, that Photios had never had any opportunity to debate with Muslims either on this alleged trip or anywhere else; otherwise he would certainly have written some details.

### **Constantine (Apostle of the Slavs).**

Like Photios, his brilliant disciple Constantine took the road to the 'Abbasid capital.

According to the Slavic vita written by Kliment Okhridski:

“After that the Ishmaelites, called Saracens, blasphemed against the divine unity of the Holy Trinity, saying: “How is that you Christians, worshipping a single God, triple Him by claiming that there is a Father, a Son, and a Spirit? If you have an explanation to this, send unto us men who can talk of these things and convince us.”<sup>55</sup>

The emperor, however, once received such a letter “called a council and sending for him, quoth, ‘have you heard philosopher, what the foul Ishmaelite utter against our creed? You, being a servant and disciple of the Holy Trinity, must go forth and oppose them’”.<sup>56</sup> The previous passage speaks about so called Muslim blasphemy, i.e.

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<sup>52</sup> -M. Hemmerdinger, 'Les 'Notices et extraits' des bibliothèques de Bagdad par Photius', *REG* 69 (1956) pp. 101-103.

<sup>53</sup> -F. Dvornik 'The embassies of Constantine-Cyril and Photius to the Arabs', VIII in idem, *Photian and Byzantine: Ecclesiastical studies* (London 1974) p. 573. The same idea was introduced more strongly by C. Mango, 'The availability of books in the Byzantine empire, A.D. 750-850' *Byzantine books and bookmen* (Washington, D.C. 1975) p. 38.

<sup>54</sup> - P. Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, pp. 35-41.

<sup>55</sup> - Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts of our blessed teacher Konstantin*, p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> - Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts of our blessed teacher Konstantin*, p. 55.

the Muslim teaching on the Trinity, as if it only occurred in the ninth-tenth century. Otherwise it could refer to one of these unknown Muslim polemical letters sent to Byzantium.

When the young philosopher arrived at Baghdad (or Sāmarrā’?), he spotted painting in shape of Satan on the Christians’ doors.<sup>57</sup> Aptly, as the author narrates, he commented sarcastically, “that is because the demons are outside their houses, rather than being inside like yours”.<sup>58</sup> Soon the Saint engaged in theological debates with his Muslim hosts. The first Muslim objection was directed at the differences between Christian sects, and the complexity of the Christian creed.<sup>59</sup> Constantine replied by comparing the Christian dogma to a deep sea, which hardly could be understood by the laity, while Islam, in his opinion, as a shallow sea could be mastered by any.<sup>60</sup> The same issue was addressed by contemporary Muslim theologians who, in return, criticised the complexity of Christianity.<sup>61</sup> On the Trinity, the favourite theme of all Muslim-Christian debates, Constantine slightly erroneously quoted the Qur’ānic verse 19: 17. The hagiographer wrote, “ We sent our spirit unto a maiden and willed that she delivered a child.”<sup>62</sup> While the exact Qur’ānic verse is “then we sent to her our angel,<sup>63</sup> and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. She said I seek refuge from thee to (Allah) most gracious (come not near) if thou dost fear Allah. He

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<sup>57</sup> -This is a historical fact, which more or less gives some credit to the authenticity of story. Other Christian Arabic writer mentioned this. See Eutychius, Sa’id b. al-Batrīq, *Kitāb al-Tarīkh*, II, p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> - Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts of our blessed teacher Konstantin*, p. 55

<sup>59</sup> - This is a common issue in almost all Muslim anti-Christian writings. See supra chapter 6.

<sup>60</sup> - Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts of our blessed teacher Konstantin*, p. 56.

<sup>61</sup> - Al-Jāhīz, says “Even if one were to exert all his zeal and summon all his intellectual resources with a view to learn the Christians’ teachings about Jesus, he would still fail to comprehend the nature of Christianity, especially its doctrine concerning the Divinity. How in the world can one succeed in grasping this doctrine, for were you to question it two Nestorians, individually, sons of the same father and mother, the answer of one brother would be the reverse of that of the other. This holds true also for the Melkites and Jacobites. As a result, we cannot comprehend the essence of Christianity to the extent that we know the other faiths”. Al-Jāhīz, *al-radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 22, English translation, J. Finkel, reprinted in, N. Newman, *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, p. 709. c.f. supra chapter 6, on the Muslim polemic.

<sup>62</sup> - Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts of our blessed teacher Konstantin*, p. 56.



said “nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord (to announce) to thee the gift of a pure son” 19: 16-19. Surprisingly, the hagiographer soon speaks of the Muslims who were “silenced by the truth of this”. It is certainly a fully doubtful narrative, to accept that most learned Muslim scholars would be speechless by such wrong quotation from their sacred book. This striking fact, one may presume, undermines the authenticity of the whole narrative. Finally the Muslims, the hagiographer claims, failing in their theological and scientific debates with young saint, tried to flabbergast him by the wealth of the caliph.<sup>64</sup>

To sum up, the text did reflect some points of the contemporary Christian-Muslim debates. Notwithstanding, one can see inconceivable tolerance by Muslims in the face of the stunning statement of the young Christian interlocutor, who says, “Muḥammad actually gave you no commandments. By not curbing your wrath and your lust, but only letting them loose, did he not fling you into abyss.”<sup>65</sup> Such phrases would certainly surpass any kind of diplomatic immunity of ambassadors at that time, provoke his hosts, and could even cost him his neck. The other story, that Constantine surpassed all the Muslim scholars in all branches of knowledge seems to be not more than hagiographical exaggeration.

### **Hagiography and apocalyptic texts**

While Byzantine polemical and historical sources dealt with Islam with a critical view, and more or less with a tendency to evaluate and subsequently refute it, the hagiographical and apocalyptic sources had another different attitude. *Prima facie*, there are, some facts, which are clearly visible. Firstly, almost none of the

<sup>63</sup> - The exact Qur’ānic word is = روحنا (our spirit), but it means angel (in its context-not literary) and appeared in the Qur’ān several times referring to angels.

<sup>64</sup> - It is well-known fact that the ‘Abbasid caliphs were very keen to show their wealth and glamour of their courts before the Byzantine ambassadors. They even forced these envoys to wait several weeks until the final touches were to complete. Hilāl al-Ṣābi’, *Rusūm dar al-khilāfah*, ed. M. ‘Wād (Beirut 1986) pp. 11-17; Bar Hebraeus, 1, p. 156.

hagiographical texts had ever tried to investigate or examine Islam as a religion. The only exception, to my knowledge, is the life the Andrew the Fool, in which the hagiographer attributed a narrative to his Saint, concerning the Islamic notion on the creation of Adam,<sup>66</sup> and the refusal of the Satan to kneel before him, yet he did not mention Islam by name. He says:

“The Samael is Satan who was cast out of heaven, not because he refused to worship Adam, as some have assumed, telling mythic tales (for man was not formed yet)”<sup>67</sup>

Generally speaking, most of the Byzantine hagiography ignored Islam, paying more attention to its primary aim; to venerate the hero saint. The writers of some of these texts usually expressed deep and absolute hatred against Muslims and Arabs. They portrayed the Muslims so:

“Lord will be angry with them because of their blasphemy and because their fruit is of Sodom’s gall and Gomorrah’s bitterness. Therefore, he will strike the emperor of the Roman and rouse him against them and he will destroy them and kill their children with fire”<sup>68</sup>

In the same vita, as well as others, the demons mostly appeared in the form of an Arab or Ethiopian, who always conspire against the righteous Christians.<sup>69</sup>

On the other hand, some other hagiographical texts had different approach to Islam. A few of them shed light on those *barbarian saints*, i.e. some of the Muslims who converted to Christianity, mostly by miracles. One of these hagiographical stories deserves more attention. Surprisingly, we have the same story from different contemporary writers within Byzantium and the Muslim world, yet with some minor differences. It is story of a certain Muslim man who lived in the Muslim world and

<sup>65</sup> - Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts of our blessed teacher Konstantin*, p. 56.

<sup>66</sup> - “And behold, We said to the angels: bow down to Adam, and they bowed down: Not so Iblīs (the Satan) he refused and was haughty: He was of those who rejected the faith” Qur’ān, 2: 34

<sup>67</sup> - L. Rydén, *The life of St. Andrew the fool*, p. 207.

<sup>68</sup> -PG. 111, cols. 852-873; L. Rydén ‘The Andreas Salos apocalypse: Greek text, translation and commentary’, *DOP* 28 (1974) p. 216; Idem, *The life of St. Andrew the Fool*, p. 263.

used to insult the Christian churches and enter with his camels inside them, until he saw the preparation of the Eucharist but miraculously he saw the priest eating a young boy and drinking his blood!! When he realised that he only was singled out to see such a miracle, he converted to Christianity and later faced execution according to the Muslim punishment of renegades.<sup>70</sup> Although the story has less important value as a polemical text, but the similarity of both the Coptic and Byzantine texts, is certainly of much greater importance. It could be considered as a part of the popular anti-Muslim propaganda. Yet the Byzantine text is relatively more aggressive in its attitude against Islam.<sup>71</sup>

Finally there is a number of saints lives, which reflect tolerant and more mutual understanding between the Muslims and Byzantine world. The Life of Saint Demetrianos of Cyprus, who travelled to Baghdad in a mission to save some of his people, who were taken prisoners in Muslim naval raids,<sup>72</sup> is one of these types. Unfortunately, the contemporary sources, including the life of Demetrianos, give only scant attention to the life and activities of the Christian saint in the Muslim capital, whether he ever met any Muslim thinkers and discussed with them theological issues. It is most likely, however, that the sensitive and distressing nature of his mission as well as his desperate need to elicit the caliph's sympathy certainly would hinder him from any kind of discussions. Nevertheless, he received a kind treatment from the authorities in Baghdad.

<sup>69</sup> - L. Rydén, *The life of St. Andrew the Fool*, pp. 16, 21, 35, 137, 145, 151, 173, 179, 183.

<sup>70</sup> -The Byzantine text see Gregory Dekapolites, *A historical speech of Gregory Dekapolites, very profitable and most pleasing in many ways, about a vision which a Saracen once had, and who, as a result of this, believed and became a martyr for our lord Jesus Christ*, PG, 100, cols. 1201-1212, English translation, D. Sahas, 'what an infidel saw that a faithful did not: Georgory Dekpolites (d. 842), and Islam', *GOTR* 31, no. 1-2 (1986) 47-67. The Arabic Coptic version. See Ibn al-Muqaffa', , II, 3, pp. 110-111.

<sup>71</sup> - See *infra*. Chapter 6, p. 303.

<sup>72</sup> - H. Grégoire, 'Saint Démétrianos, évêque de Chytri ( île de Chypre) *BZ* 16 (1907) pp. 204-240. See Jenkins, 'The mission of St. Demetrianus of Cyprus to Baghdad' N. XVI in Idem, *Studies on Byzantine history of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century*.

On the other hand, the fierce struggle between the two antagonists, Byzantines and Muslims, had produced stories of martyrs and heroes on both sides. On the Byzantine side there were several lives of those who have been killed by Muslims, either in the battlefields or aftermath, and considered martyrs whose memories lived and flourished in the popular traditions.

### **Evode and the other text of the martyrs of Amorium <sup>73</sup>**

The story of the 42 Byzantine officers who were taken prisoners at Amorium and later executed near Baghdad attracted several hagiographical writers. The first text is attributed to an almost unknown Byzantine hagiographer, called Evode.<sup>74</sup> The other anonymous text was published by F. Halkin.<sup>75</sup> Both texts are similar in some aspects and completely different in others. Evode's text, however could be considered as a hagiographic and a polemical treatise directed against Islam, in which he quoted and used several arguments from other Byzantine works, mainly Niketas of Byzantium, while the anonymous text, was just a hagiographic and a bitter lament for the ill fate of the prisoners.

The main difference, however between both texts, is that Evode's is a genuine polemic work, following the stereotype of the Byzantine polemic. The text was related directly to the military struggle between Muslims and Byzantines. Evode was keen to accuse Muslims of being a "bloodstained race". He vigorously criticised their sexual life, and their notion of paradise,<sup>76</sup> as well as the personality and prophecy of

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<sup>73</sup> - A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 163-179.

<sup>74</sup> - Evode, *Βίος και ἀθλήσεις τῶν ἀγίων τεσσαράκοντα δύο μαρτύων*. (Passions of the forty two martyrs of Amorium) *Acta Sanctorum*, mars 1, (Venice 1735) reprinted (Brussels 1966) pp. 887-893, Latin trans. 460-466; ed. P. A. Vasilievskij, and P. Niktin, in: *Mémoires de impériale des Sciences de Saint Pétersbourg (Sc. Hist-phil)*, Ser. 8, VII, 2 (1905) pp. 61-78, partial English translation. J. Hamilton, and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World (650-1450) selected sources translated and annotated* (Manchester University Press 1998) pp. 63-65.

<sup>75</sup> - F. Halkin, 'Passion inédite des Quarante-deux martyrs d'Amorium', Greek text pp. 152-161; French translation. 162-169.

<sup>76</sup> - The future life in paradise which was promised for Muslims, according to the Qur'an and Hadith will give men the pleasure of having several unique heavenly wives *Ḥūr al-'īn*. This word had been

Muhammad. The anonymous text goes back some centuries to recall the personal hostility between offspring of Abraham, which led, in his opinion, to the recent Muslim hatred towards Christianity.<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, he interpreted the Old Testament story of Abraham and his two wives, (Gen. 21) that Sarah prophesied that Ishmael (and his offspring, i.e. the Muslims) would stray from God.<sup>78</sup> These stories may reflect a popular attitude towards Islam, and yet a new diversion of the Christian attempts to seek explanation of Islam in the Old Testament.

It is noteworthy that Evode composed polemical works against Islam, still unpublished, in which he, as A. Khoury pointed out, drew heavily on Niketas of Byzantium.<sup>79</sup> It is noteworthy that A. Khoury seems not to have seen or at least used these manuscripts; inasmuch as he did not make use of them in his works on Byzantine polemic, which doubts his criteria on their relation to Niketas' work.<sup>80</sup>

### Arethas of Caesarea

Among the Byzantine polemic against Islam, there is a letter attributed to Arethas.<sup>81</sup> It is sent to a certain Muslim emir as a reply to an original letter sent from that emir, and now lost. *Prima facie*, one can realise that the pugnacious style of Arethas is surely far from any real exchanged letters between two distinguished persons in Byzantium and the Muslim world. As a polemical work, the letter reflects most of the common Byzantine objects. Furthermore, the historical facts given by this letter are ambiguous and completely contradictory with each other. The problems

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mentioned in the Qur'an four times. See F. Rosenthal, 'Reflections on love in paradise', no. 16, *idem*, *Muslim intellectual and social history* (London 1990).

<sup>77</sup> - F. Halkin, 'Passion inédite des Quarante-deux martyrs d'Amorium', p. 154.

<sup>78</sup> - F. Halkin, 'Passion inédite des Quarante-deux martyrs d'Amorium', p. 153.

<sup>79</sup> - *Chapitres de la fausse Ecriture de Muhammad* (MS - unpublished), Athos 1854. : Ms. unpublished (Escorial 459) Cod. Athos Laurae 1854; A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, pp. 163-168; R. Caspar et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien', *Islamochristiana* 1 (1975) p. 172.

<sup>80</sup> - Unfortunately I was not able to use these manuscripts.

<sup>81</sup> - Arethas of Caesarea, *Scripta minora*, 1, pp. 233-245; 'Arethas letter to the Emir at Damascus' ed. P. Karlin-Hayter, *B* 29-30 (1959- 1960) pp. 281-302; French trans. A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas' à l'Émir de Damas' *B* 24 (1954) 343-370.

with that letter begin immediately with the title. While it says: “Πρὸς τὸν ἐν Δαμασκῷ ἀμηρᾶν”, we discover soon that the letter was sent to the emir of Emet “Τὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἑμετ ἀποσταλέντα πρὸς ἡμᾶς”<sup>82</sup>. The question which imposes itself is did any Muslim emir in the first decades of the tenth century send a polemical letter to Byzantium? Furthermore, to whom did he send his letter, to the emperor or personally to Arethas? And who provoked him to write that letter? One may ask who was the writer of the Muslim alleged letter, an emir of Damascus (or Emet) or a theologian sponsored by that emir?

Unfortunately, in spite of the intensive discussions by A. Khoury, A. Abel, and P. Karlin-Hayter, and others,<sup>83</sup> there is no clear answer for most of these questions. Firstly one may suppose that the aggressive personality of Arethas would not allow him to have a chance to exchange letters with a Muslim emir. Hence the only other option is that the letter was sent to the emperor, by a certain Muslim emir, and the emperor asked the brilliant theologian to refute the Muslims claims, as it reportedly happened.

The letter itself has several mistakes and some contradictions. Firstly, the author, an anti-Islamic theologian, was confused between Muḥammad and his disciple and adopted son Zayd<sup>84</sup>, calling the latter (Ῥουσουλουλέ) (Arabic رسول الله

<sup>82</sup> - Arethas of Caesarea, *Scripta minora*, 1, pp. 233-234 ;Karlin-Hayter, Arthas' letter, p. 293.

<sup>83</sup> -A. Vasiliev, (Canard), *Byzance et les Arabes*, 2: I, pp. 411- 420; D. Sahas, 'Arethas' 'Letter to the Emir at Damascus': Official or popular views on Islam in the 10th century Byzantium?', ; A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas' à l'émir de Damas'.

<sup>84</sup> -Zāyḍ b. Ḥārithah, a companion and adopted son (adoption was forbidden in Islam after that) of Muḥammad, who married Zaynab b. Jaḥsh (A relative of Muḥammad). According to the Muslim narratives, the marriage was in crisis inasmuch as the lady did not like her man (a former slave) and complained to Muḥammad. This story had been used in all Byzantine polemical texts against Islam, as well as Latin. However it is worth looking more closely at the sharply different narratives, as well as attitudes towards that story. The Qur'ān dealt with the story saying: “ And when you said to him to whom Allah had shown favour and to whom you had shown a favour: Keep your wife to yourself and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; and you concealed in your soul what Allah would bring to light, and you feared men, and Allah had a greater right that you should fear Him. But when Zayd had accomplished his want of her, We gave her to you as a wife, so that there should be

= messenger of God).<sup>85</sup> Furthermore he refers to the Muslims' sacred book (The Qur'ān) and one of its names (al-Furqān) as two different books taught by Muḥammad.<sup>86</sup> The internal contradictions of the letter are best described P. Karlin-Hayter, who summarised them by saying, "There is not, as far as one can see, any perfect solution to the problems set by this text, one can only look for the solution that offers least objects"<sup>87</sup>

The letter as a polemical work reflects some facts and phases of the Byzantine understanding of Islam. The writer of the letter, whether Arethas or not, seems to be

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no difficulty for the believers in respect of the wives of their adopted sons, when they have accomplished their want of them; and Allah's command shall be performed." Qur'ān 33.37.

This brief allusion to the story, made more confusion, and received sharply different attitudes, as well as different attempts and views of the Muslim early and later scholars to explain this issue. While on the other side, the story and Muḥammad marriage of that divorced lady had attracted more attention from non-Muslim polemicists. Among the Muslim scholars there are a very few who admitted that Muḥammad had fallen in love with lady, or at least she attracted his attention when he was visiting the couple. Al-Ṭabrī (in a little and relatively unknown book) says "the prophet (peace be upon him) went to Zayd's house looking for him, as Zayd was known as Ibn Muḥammad, and the messenger of God may miss him and ask where is Zayd? So he came to his house and did not find him. While Zaynab welcomed him, he left humming of something, only appears from it "Glory to God who changes the hearts". Zayd came back to his house and his wife told him that the messenger of God, peace be upon him, came to their house. Zayd said did you call him to enter to the house, she said I have but he refused. Zayd asked, did you hear him saying anything, she said, I heard him leaving and humming of something, from it I only recognised "Glory to God who changes the hearts". Zayd went till he reached the messenger of God, peace be upon him, and said: I was told that you came to my house O messenger of God, so why did not you enter, my parents are redemption for you, may Zaynab attracted you, so I will leave her. The messenger of God said, keep your wife. While Zayd could not reach her (فما استطاع إليها سبيلا) after this"

The majority of Muslim narratives, agreed that, Muḥammad had been told by angels that he would marry that lady, so when her husband complained to him and announced his intension to divorce her, Muḥammad, who knew that he would marry her, but fearing the gossip of people in society, lest they would not accept the idea of marriage of the former wife of an adopted son, strongly advised Zāyd not to divorce her. The main proof for this theory was the fact that, the verses did not accuse Muḥammad of having looked at someone else' wife. Among the modern Muslim thinkers, there is a sharp contrast in their attitude towards that story. While M. Haykal, the late Egyptian writer strongly denied the whole story and fiercely attacked the Orientlists for their *mala fide*. Another Egyptian writer, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, 'Āshah, accepted that Muḥammad had some feelings towards the lady, and his words (Glory to God, who changes the hearts) indicate his surprise for such a sudden feeling of that one whom he used to see for a long time before her marriage. Al-Ṭabarī, *al-Muntakhab min kitāb zayl al-muzayl min tārīkh al-ṣahābah wa al-ṭabi'īn*, ed. De Goeje, as a continuation of al-Ṭabarī great history (Leiden 1890) pp. 2447-2448. See A. 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *Trājim Saidāt bayt al-nubuwah*, (life of the ladies of Muḥammad's family), (Beirut n.d.) pp. 340-346; M. Haykal, *The life of Muḥammad*, English trans. al-Fārūqī, (North American Trust Publications 1976), pp. 294-298.

<sup>85</sup> - Arethas of Caesarea, *Scripta minora*, I, p. 239; Karlin-Hayter, 'Arthas' letter', p. 297; French translation, A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas', p. 364.

<sup>86</sup> - Arethas of Caesarea, *Scripta minora*, I, p 234; Karlin-Hayter, 'Arthas' letter', p. 293; French translation, A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas', p. 356.

fully aware of the common Muslim objections against Christianity. He cited accurately at least 5 of the major themes of Muslim polemics, which supported the hypothesis of an existing, yet missing Muslim letter, or, what is less probable, that the knowledge of Muslim objections reached the Byzantine world in such accurate form. However, a parallel and careful study between this letter and a Muslim letter which belongs to ninth century but attributed to the caliph 'Umar II<sup>88</sup> shows considerable similarity between the two letters which may suggest that they are related to each other.

The first Muslims objection, which Arethas challenged, was the question, how God could be in unclean environment inside the womb of a woman?<sup>89</sup> Arethas refuted another Muslim objection which denies the divinity of Christ on the ground that his miracles were not unique themselves and several prophets had preformed similar miracles without the claim divinity by being doing so.<sup>90</sup> Though this Muslim objection used by most of the Muslim theologians in their anti-Christian polemic,<sup>91</sup> here it stands as one of the several similarities between the two letters, that is of Arethas and 'Umar II's letter. Furthermore, another Muslim objection in 'Umar's letter and its reply appears again in Arethas' letter, concerning the Christian

<sup>87</sup> - Karlin-Hayter, 'Arthas' letter', p. 287.

<sup>88</sup> - Anonymous, 'Un pamphlet musulman anonyme', pp. 27-28 (the Arabic text) p. 14 (French translation D. Sourdél); English translation with comparing of other text of the same letter, see J. M. Gaudéul, 'The correspondence between Leo and 'Umar', pp. 146-147.

<sup>89</sup> - This question was asked and used in Muslim apologies by several Muslim theologians. The anonymous letter attributed to the caliph 'Umar II and alleged to be sent to the emperor Leo III, which most tend to date it to the ninth century, asked the same Muslim question. "In your error, your ignorance and your presumption in the face of God praise and Glory to him – you still pretend that God came down from His majesty, His sovereignty, His almighty power, His light, His glory, His force, His greatness and His power, even to the point of entering into the womb of a woman in suffocating grief, imperfection, in narrow and dark confines in pain." D. Sourdél 'Un pamphlet musulman anonyme', p. 27 (the Arabic text) p. 13 (French translation); English translation with, see J. M. Gaudéul, 'The correspondence between Leo and 'Umar, p. 144; idem, *Encounters and clashes*, 1, p. 40.

<sup>90</sup> - Karlin-Hayter, Arthas' letter, p. 295; French translation, A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas', p. 360.

<sup>91</sup> - Ibn Abi al-Layth, *Letter du caliphe Hârûn al-Rashid*, p. 59 (the Arabic text) p. 77 (French trans. Hadi Eid) p. 77; al-Mâturîdi, *Kitâb al-tawhîd*, pp. 211-212.



veneration of the cross and relics.<sup>92</sup> Notably, Arethas did not use the reply of Leo and counter attack Muslim objection by accusing Muslims of adoring Muḥammad's clothes.<sup>93</sup> There are still more parallel points between Arethas' letter and the alleged letter of 'Umar, such as polygamy, the Muslim notion of paradise, Muslim holy war or Jihad. Although these points are common in the Byzantine-Muslim polemic as is shown here, the consistent similarity between the two letters may help to support a new hypothesis.

On the ground of the aforementioned coincidence of the two letters, and in light of the contradictions and historical problem of Arethas' letter, there is no clear evidence to support the notion of a real letter sent to Arethas by a certain Muslim emir. Also as I have said before, the language of Arethas' letter seems to be far from the traditional letters exchanged between Byzantines and Muslims, one may therefore hypothesis that Arethas never wrote to any Muslim emir, and this treatise was written as a response to the so-called 'Umar's letter which was circulated in Byzantium sometimes at the end of the ninth century, or at beginning of the tenth century.<sup>94</sup>

But the previous theory is certainly far from being the absolute truth in the light of an allusion in one of the Arabic sources on a certain polemical letter sent to the Muslims by the king of Rum, (Byzantium), upon the defeat and humiliation of the Muslims by the Qaramitans.<sup>95</sup> The reference to the Qaramitans appeared in Byzantine polemics, to my knowledge, only in Arethas' letter. For that letter, there was a lost Muslim reply written by Aḥmad b. Yaḥya b. al-Munajjim (d. 938-327), under the

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<sup>92</sup> - D. Sourdel, 'Un pamphlet musulman anonyme', p. 29 (the Arabic text) p. 17 (French translation); English translation, J. M. Gaudeul, 'The correspondence between Leo and 'Umar', pp. 149-150.

<sup>93</sup> - Arethas, *Scripta minora*, I, p. 238-239; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas' letter to the emir at Damascus', p. 297, French translation. A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas' p. 363.

<sup>94</sup> - H. Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur*, p. 338.

<sup>95</sup> - 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīr dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, II, p. 343.

patronage of the prominent vizier 'Alī b. 'Īsā (d. 316 / 929A).<sup>96</sup> The dilemma, which puzzled several modern scholars on dealing with Arethas' letter, its chronology, and the identity of the Muslim emir (or vizier), will be resolved by this narrative.

One may assume safely that a certain Byzantine letter, more or less, related to our copy of Arethas' or at best, a modified diplomatic one, had been sent by the command of the emperor and reached Baghdad, where the pious vizier undertook the task to reply and entrusted this to Ibn al-Munajjim for that. On chronological ground, the first vizierate of 'Alī b. 'Īsā, which lies between (301-304.H. / 913-914 A. D.) is just a few years after the historical events mentioned by Arethas (victory of Andronikos Doukas 904AD./291H. ; naval victory of Himerios 905AD./292H.). Furthermore, we know for certain that 'Alī b. 'Īsā exchanged delegations and letters with the Byzantine authorities concerning Muslim prisoners of war.<sup>97</sup>

Recently D. Sahas examined all aspects of Arethas' letter, as well as the theories of the modern scholars around it.<sup>98</sup> If, indeed we accept his reading of the title to be emperor Romanos (920-944), instead of the word Roman read by Popov in his *editio princeps* of the letter, this reading coincides perfectly with the second vizierate of 'Alī b. 'Īsā (315-316 H. / 926-929A. D.). However, Sahas supports the notion which dates the letter as early as 905.<sup>99</sup>

But who wrote the first Muslim letter? I have shown that there are some similarities between Arethas' letter and the so-called 'Umar letter, which belongs to the ninth or tenth century. The Tunisian writer al-Sharfi cautiously suggested al-Jāhiz as the author of that letter.<sup>100</sup> The language of the letter, however, seems similar to

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<sup>96</sup> -Idem.

<sup>97</sup> - See supra. Chapter 3, p. 162-163

<sup>98</sup> - D. Sahas, 'Arethas' 'Letter to the Emir at Damascus': Official or popular views on Islam in the 10th century Byzantium? ',

<sup>99</sup> - D. Sahas, 'Arethas' letter', p. 77.

<sup>100</sup> - Al-Sharfi, *al-Fikr al-islami ft al-radd 'ala al-Naṣrā*, pp. 160-161.

Jāhiz's. But the letter, refers several times to a previous Byzantine letter sent to the Muslims, which would suggest a chain of letters and replies with no chronological confirmation, so the theory of al-Sharfi offers more problems than solutions. Nevertheless, it is quite possible to confirm the theory of al-Sharfi.

Finally, there are some unique points in Arethas' letters, which were relatively unknown (or unused) in Byzantine polemic, such as using the alleged miracle of the lights of the holy sepulchre of Jerusalem, which according to the Christian narratives, light up during the Christmas celebrations.<sup>101</sup> Remarkably this alleged miracle attracted some Muslim historians, rather than theologians, to speak about it as well as refute it.<sup>102</sup>

### Ritual abjuration of the converted former Muslim

The extreme side of the Byzantine attitude towards Islam is exemplified in a formal document designed for the Muslims who converted to Christianity in Byzantine lands. Those converts were required to go through a special ritual of abjuration, in which they had to anathematise their old religion. The text of the abjuration listed 22 anathemas against all elements of Islam including Muḥammad and his God, as well as his family, a number of his disciples and some caliphs till Yazīd (680-683).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> -Arethas of Caesarea, *Scripta minora*, 1, p. 240; P. Karlin-Hayter 'Arethas letter to the Emir at Damascus', p. 298; French trans. A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas' à l'Émir de Damas', p. 365.

<sup>102</sup> -Ibn al-Qalānisi, pp. 67-77; al-Maqrīzi, *Itt'āz*, II. p. 75.

<sup>103</sup> Niketas Choniates, *Thesaurus Orthodoxae Fidei, Ordo qui observatur super iis qui a Saracenis ad nostram Christianorum puram vermaque fidem fidem se convertunt*, PG 140, cols. 123-136 ; see F. Cumont, 'L'origine de la formule grecque d'abjuration imposée aux Musulmans' *RHR* 64 (1911) pp. 143-150; Clermont-Ganneau, 'Ancien rituel grec pour l'abjuration des Musulmans dans l'Église Grecque' *RAO* 7 (1906) 254-257. See D. Sahas, 'Ritual of conversion from Islam to the Byzantine church [12th century]', *GOTR* 36 (1991) 57-69.

Although some modern scholars suggested a western origin of the text,<sup>104</sup> it was a well-known practice in Byzantium, used not only for Muslims and Jews who converted to Christianity but also for those who repented from other Christian heresies like Paulicians and Pogomils.<sup>105</sup> Niketas Choniates referred to the existence of this practice, when the emperor Manuel “contended that it was scandalous that Agarenes, when being converted to our God-fearing faith, should be made to blaspheme God in any matter.”<sup>106</sup>

It is noteworthy that a Melkite hagiographical text in the ninth century gave a glimpse of such a practice in a legendary story about the conversion of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn<sup>107</sup> by saint Michael of Edessa, in which the bishop asked the caliph after his conversion to anathematise Muḥammad and his teachings as well as the heresies of Arians and Manichaens.<sup>108</sup> This text, which was omitted from the Arabic version as Vasiliev realised,<sup>109</sup> apart from its extreme imagination may reflect an existence of a Byzantine ritual for Muslim converters into Christianity, which coincided with the systematic policy of depopulating large numbers of Muslims and converting them, willingly or grudgingly to Christianity.<sup>110</sup>

In sum, this rite, whatever its date, reflects a deep mistrust in Byzantium towards those Muslims who converted to Christianity. It is written carefully and expressed an utter abomination of Islam and its prophet, to make an absolute

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<sup>104</sup> - J. Pelikan, *The Christian tradition, a history of the development of doctrine: 2 the spirit of eastern Christianity (600-1700)* (University of Chicago Press 1974) p. 228.

<sup>105</sup> - J. Meyendorff, 'Byzantine views of Islam', p. 124; J. Hamilton et al., *Christian dualist heresies in the Byzantine world, c. 650-1404*, p.102-110. There are some allusions to a similar practice in the seventh century Coptic Church, when the converter had to anathematise his old heresy. See Mena of Nikiou, *The life of Isaac of Alexandria*, p. 65.

<sup>106</sup> -Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker, (Bonn 1835) p. 278, English trans. H. J. Magoulias, *O city of Byzantium*, p. 121.

<sup>107</sup> -In the Greek text it mentions the caliph as Mu'āwiya while in the Arabic version the caliph was al-Ma'mūn

<sup>108</sup> - A. Vasliev, 'The life of St. Theodore of Edessa', p.197.

<sup>109</sup> - A. Vasliev, 'The life of St. Theodore of Edessa', p.197, note. 126.

<sup>110</sup> - See supra pp. 177-180.

assurance of the conversion. However, there is also much evidence that Byzantine authorities took a more practical, tolerant attitude to those who converted superficially or even those who kept their religion but served in the Byzantine army.<sup>111</sup> While the church, on the other hand, required such an absolute assurance of the newly converted, presumably this was a necessary step to accept them socially within the Byzantine society.

On the other hand, the existence of this anathema in the *catechetical* books of the Byzantine churches, as Niketas said, indicates a policy of the church to burn all bridges with Islam.

### Leo VI's *Tactica*

Writing on Islam had attracted some intellectual Byzantine emperors to show their masterly knowledge on the surrounding world. Emperor Leo VI speaks briefly of the Muslims' attitude towards Jesus Christ and their denial of his divinity, as well as their recognition of him as Saviour of the world. He touched upon a point of Byzantine-Muslim polemic, I mean predestination, and accuses the Muslim of attributing the evil acts (like war) to God. In his *Tactica*, the emperor Leo declares explicitly a holy war against the Muslims.<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, he realised Muslim men fight against Byzantine armies voluntary, and he could hardly hide his antagonism against them. He was well aware of the religious propaganda, which pushes men to fight willingly. So he was surely keen to use that to provoke his soldiers to fight against the enemies of Christ and the empire, not only because of the obligation, but also with pleasure.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> - Symeonis Magistri, p. 760.

<sup>112</sup> - Leo, *Tactica*, XVIII, PG 107: cols. 972 b-d. 976 c-d. On recruitment in Byzantium See J. F. Haldon, 'Recruitment and conscription in the Byzantine army c. 550-950' p. 48; c.f. .P. Lemerle, *The Agrarian history of Byzantium from the origins to the twelfth century* (Galway 1979) p. 141f.

<sup>113</sup> - Leo, *Tactica*, Constitution XVIII, PG 107: cols. 972 b-d. 976 c-d.

## The emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus

The emperor Constantine VII in his *De Administrando Imperio*, had almost imitated the text of Theophanes verbatim, and mixed it with additions from Hamartolos, to produce some lines on his explanation to the Muslim words “allah akbar”, which had been invented and used by Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople.<sup>114</sup>

## The poem of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas against Islam and Muslims<sup>115</sup>

In the propaganda war between Byzantium and Muslims, it was the only time that Byzantium used the favourite weapon of Arabs, i.e. poetry. Between Arabs, before and after Islam, poetry was the main style of propaganda between the rival tribes. In the struggle against Byzantium, poetry played an essential role. It provoked the soldiers to fight and eulogized Arabic heroism, while on the other hand, poetry played a considerably less important role in the Byzantine-Muslim polemic. The only known exchange satirical poems between Byzantines and Muslims occurred during the campaigns of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas in Syria in the tenth century. Extraordinarily, the emperor borrowed the traditional Arabic style and sent a long poem to the caliph. The writer is unknown but presumably he was a Christian Arab working in the service of the Byzantine emperor.

*Prima facie*, the language and style of the poem looks simple and is poorly presented. The poem has 52 verses, only 3 of which could be considered polemical. Those say that: the throne of Jesus had ascended into the sky while Muḥammad lay in his tomb, and his offspring suffered killing, after his death.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore he

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<sup>114</sup> - Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, pp. 76-79.

<sup>115</sup> - G. Grönebaum, 'Eine poetische Polemik', pp. 47-50; al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-shāfi'iyyah*, 2, pp. 179-181.

<sup>116</sup> -In verses, 50-52, he alluded to several attacks against the members of the 'Alawīn (offspring of 'Ali, the cousin of the prophet and husband of his daughter Faṭimah) who tried to rebel against both

threatened to conquer Mecca and establish a new Christian rule in the Muslim sacred places, soon after he would spread the religion of the cross (Christianity) all over the world.<sup>117</sup> To sum up, the main theme of the poem is a political and military threat directed at the Muslim, and as a part of the political and military propaganda.

The Byzantine poem had wide repercussion in the Muslim world and provoked some Muslim thinkers to reply. Remarkably, it reached as far as al-Andalus. Where Ibn Ḥazm, replied using the same rhyme, which recalls the same style used by the Arabic poets in their poetic debates.<sup>118</sup>

### Diplomatic polemic

Byzantine-Muslims missions were sent mainly for diplomatic and political reasons between the two powers, such as making peace, exchange of prisoners, or even to deal with renegades escaping to the other side. Notwithstanding, these missions were a unique chance and one of the meeting-points between the two different societies.

Recently, P. Magdalino pointed out that the choice of four leading Byzantine learned men,<sup>119</sup> as head of missions to Baghdad may indicate that there was a need for philosophical and religious discussions with the Muslims scholars.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, the emperors seemed keen to embarrass the Arab sovereigns with the wisdom of the Greeks, still alive in the Christian Byzantium, *contrary to rumours*.<sup>121</sup> What Magdalino meant by 'rumours', can be explained not as Arab rumours against Byzantines,<sup>122</sup> but a genuine part of the Muslim encounter with Byzantines, which

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the Umayyads and 'Abbasids but they were exposed to severe defeats and executions in most cases, or were assassinated earlier by their rivals.

<sup>117</sup> - Verses, 45-49.

<sup>118</sup> - On the Muslim replies see infra chapter 5, pp. 297-300.

<sup>119</sup> - John the Grammarian, Saint Constantine apostle of the Slavs, Photios and Leo Choïrosphaktes.

<sup>120</sup> - P. Magdalino, 'The Road to Baghdad', p. 206.

<sup>121</sup> - P. Magdalino, 'The Road to Baghdad', p. 206.

<sup>122</sup> - Most of the Arab thinkers admired Byzantine knowledge but insisted on distinguishing between Byzantines (Christians) and the Greek thinkers who were not Christian, and who were fully

was not only a military struggle but also an intellectual contact and a meeting between the civilisations as well as a part of the polemic between them.

In that encounter of the two powers, each made claims of superiority. The Byzantines claimed that they were superior in their knowledge and are the successors of the great Greek thinkers. The Arabs were keen to distinguish between Byzantium and the Greek glorious and honourable reputation in the Arabic milieu. Furthermore, one can find a repercussion of the Byzantine pride in their scientific superiority, appeared in the Muslim polemic. Al-Jāḥiẓ says:

“They even went so far as to assert that our scientists were the followers of the Byzantine writers and our writers their imitators. Such is the state of affairs”<sup>123</sup>

Unfortunately, neither Arab nor Byzantine sources give adequate details about these the debates, if any, of the Byzantine thinkers and their discussions with the Muslim learned men.

### **Leo VI and Alexander and Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn**

In a unique narrative, Severus of Alexandria (Ibn al-Muqaffa'), the Coptic contemporary historian, speaks of polemical letters exchanged between Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn, the governor of Egypt (868-884 AD./ 254-270 H. ), and the emperors Leo VI (886-912 ) and his brother Alexander, (ruled alone 912-913). Unfortunately, we have only a part of the alleged Byzantine reply from which we know fragments of the Muslim letter, which was supposed to discuss the exchange of prisoners of war, but turned to be a polemical letter, to discuss the divine filiation of Christ<sup>124</sup>. *Prima facie*, the discrepancy in the dates of both rulers casts strong doubt on the authenticity of

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respected by Arabs. For a fully discussion. See in particular, N. El-Cheikh-Saliba, *Byzantium Viewed by Arabs*, Ph.D. Thesis (Harvard University 1992) passim. See infra, pp. 292-291.

<sup>123</sup> -Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 17. English trans, J. Finkel, reprinted in, N. Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, p. 704.

<sup>124</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II, 3, p. 75.



this narrative. It is noteworthy, however, that this letter alluded to some previous Muslim letters sent to Byzantium, yet without insults.<sup>125</sup>

### Leo Choiosphaktes

Leo, a high-ranking Byzantine diplomat,<sup>126</sup> visited Baghdad several times. We know from the narrative of Bar Hebraeus that he (Leo) had to wait for two months until the caliph prepared for parade to receive the Byzantine ambassador.<sup>127</sup> Such a time space would give him a chance for closer contact with the Muslims within their lands, but unfortunately there are no details about his daily life and contacts with the Arabs, either in his own writings or in others. Presumably, as a Byzantine ambassador he would not have the opportunity to debate freely with Muslim scholars, and more important, he did not allude in his letters to such debates.<sup>128</sup> Some modern scholars attributed the Arethas' letter to Leo Choiosphaktes.<sup>129</sup> Obviously the internal contradictions of that letter made it difficult in attributing it either to Arethas or to Leo, but the majority of modern scholars agreed to attribute the letter to Arethas. Yet the trips of Leo to the 'Abbasid capital would certainly have given him more knowledge on Islam, at least more than Arethas, yet mistakes in the names of the prophet (see above) and other contradictions may rule out the possibility of Leo as a writer.

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<sup>125</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II, 3, p. 75.

<sup>126</sup> - He enjoyed some titles, magister, proconsul and patrikios. See G. Koliaş on Leo's life in, Leo Choiosphaktes, *Léon Choerosphacté magistre, proconsul et patrice*, passim.

<sup>127</sup> - Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 156.

<sup>128</sup> - G. Koliaş, *Leon Choerosphactes*, 47-49, 90-97.

<sup>129</sup> - R. Jenkins, 'Leo Choiosphactes and the Saracen Vizier', pp. 167-175. J. Meyendorff supports his theory. See J. Meyendorff, 'Byzantine views of Islam', pp. 128-129. This was vigorously opposed by P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas, Choiosphactes and the Saracen Vizier' No. IX in idem, *Studies in Byzantine Political history*.

## The contribution of the Melkite Church to Christian anti-Islamic polemic

It is noteworthy that, the Melkite church did not contribute efficiently in the polemical and religious antagonism between Muslims and Christians. Obviously, its situation in the realm of Islam did not give the Melkites enough freedom to write real polemical works similar to that sharp tone of the Byzantine polemical works, inasmuch as the Islamic terms of ahl-al-Dhimmah, forbade any blasphemy against Islam or its prophet.<sup>130</sup> In the 12<sup>th</sup> century a Melkite Bishop, Paul of Sidon,<sup>131</sup> aptly attributed his polemical work, to the Byzantine and Latin elite theologians who obtained copies of the Muslim holy book. Yet he could have had some of his materials from the Byzantine polemic, but the very same language, employment of the vocabularies are similar to his other works, while the accuracy of his Qur'anic quotations<sup>132</sup> suggests that he is the actual author, who tried to avoid any fatal clash with the Muslim authorities.<sup>133</sup>

Indeed after the death of the prolific Melkite writer Theodore Abū-Qurrah (d. circa 825), we have only a few examples of polemical Melkite treatises; most of them

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<sup>130</sup> - 'There are two sets of conditions included in a tribute contract (of the non-Muslims): one obligatory and the other desirable. The requisite conditions are six in number: first, to refrain from any defamation or distortion of God Almighty's scripture; second not to talk of the Apostle, God bless him and grant him salvation, in terms of denial or disparagement; third, not to talk of Islamic faith in derogatory or slanderous language. Al-Māwardī, *al-aḥkām al-sultāniyya*, p. 145 (English trans. Wahba, p. 161). See also: A. Turki, 'Situation du Tributaire qui insulte l'Islam au regard de la doctrine et de la jurisprudence musulmanes', *SI* 30 (1969) 39-72.

<sup>131</sup> - Paul de Antioche, évêque Melkite de Sidon (XIIe) ed. et French Trad. P. Khoury (s. d.)

<sup>132</sup> - There are some minor mistakes in these quotations, but M. H Siddiqi argues convincingly that they are due to the negligence of the later copiers, inasmuch as Ibn Taymiyah did not comment on such mistakes, which he would certainly do if they were indeed in the original copy. See M. H Siddiqi, 'Muslim and Byzantine Christian relations: letter of Paul of Antioch and Ibn Taymyah's response', *GOTR* 31, 1-2 (1986) 33-45

<sup>133</sup> - Several Muslim theologians replied and refuted the letter of Paul of Antioch, but the most important and longest one was written by Ibn Taymiah (d. 1328 A.D./ 728 H.) in four volumes. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man badal dīn al-Masīḥ* (the right answer to those who changed the religion of the Christ) (Cairo, 1905). English translation, (al-Jawāb al-saḥīḥ,) *A Muslim Theologian's response to Christianity*, trans. T. F. Michel (New York 1984.) see M. H Siddiqi, 'Muslim and Byzantine Christian relations: letter of Paul of Antioch and Ibn Taymyah's response'.

are still in manuscript form and have not been published yet.<sup>134</sup> One of these manuscripts attributes authorship to Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, and it is in private possession in Lebanon.<sup>135</sup> However, apart from that ambiguous work, there is almost no polemical work from the clergy of that church.

Qisṭa b. Lūqa (d. 912) composed a single polemical work against Islam. This work is a reply to a message of the Muslim thinker and friend Ibn al-Munajjim, in which he tried to use a rational and as he said, a mathematical theory to prove the prophethood of Muḥammad.

The most important part of the Christian Melkite reply, is an apology for becoming involved in such dialogue. He Says:

“God knows, and he does know precisely, that I have not said this (his apology), trying to refute anyone, nor wishing to dismantle any strong will or straight belief. And my strongest evidence for that is that I have not started or volunteered, (this debate) but only after a hard pressure and great insistence”<sup>136</sup>

The text reflects clearly the wish of the Melkite writer to avoid any polemical dispute with his Muslim friend. However, in his main argument he tried to refute the Muslim notion of divine revelations of the Qur’ān on the ground of its superior eloquence. He referred to other masterpieces of literature in some nations and alluded that no one claims a divine source for them, which could be applied to the Qur’ān as well.

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<sup>134</sup> - J. Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'église Melchite du Ve au XXe*. (Paris 1979) p. 202; For a complete Bibliography of the Arabic Christian works against Islam, see R. Caspar et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien', *Islamochristiana*, 1, (1975) pp. 152-169; 2, (1976) p. 202-237.

<sup>135</sup> - R. Gaspar et al., 'Bibliographie du Dialogue islamo-chrétien', *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976) p. 202; G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 2, p. 51; J. Harper Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab chronicle*, I, p. 21.

<sup>136</sup> -S. K. Samir (ed.) *Une Correspondance islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munaḡḡim, Hunain b. Ishaq and Qusta Ibn Luqa*, p. 164.

Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq, the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, composed two known works, his annals that cover from the creation until 938 /326 H., and a lengthy polemical treatise against Jews, in which he defended the rightness of Christianity in general, and his sect (the Chalcedonians) in particular.

In his books, like other Christian Arab writers, he did not become involved in any kind of polemic, or even criticism against Muslims. While he paid special attention to the disputes between the Christian Arabs and the Muslim authorities, over issues like churches or taxes,<sup>137</sup> he was extremely cautious in his narrative. At the same time he tried to defend his creed as a Chalcedonian and refute the other Christian sects,<sup>138</sup> while Islam does not appear at all in his discussions. In sum he clearly avoided any allusion against Islam. Notwithstanding, a close examination of his annals reveals some interesting and noteworthy points.

*Prima facie*, in the language and style of the writings, one can find some traces of the Qur'ān's style and expressions at a few points.<sup>139</sup> More important, there are some scattered hints in the two books that reflect more or less some repercussions of the Muslim-Christian current dialogues. In the introduction to the annals, he thanks God who creates his creatures and give them a free will to choose their action.<sup>140</sup> One can safely see that as a repercussion of the issue of the free will and predestination, which was one of the points covered in the Muslim dialogues.

On other points he supposes a question and tried to find an adequate answer. One of these questions is, why did not Christ say explicitly in the Bible "I am God"?<sup>141</sup> This is a common Muslim question based on the text of the Bible itself, which challenges the Christian dogma of the divinity of Jesus, inasmuch as he (Jesus)

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<sup>137</sup> - Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Tarīkh*, II, p. 59, 82-83, 86-87.

<sup>138</sup> - Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Tarīkh*, II, pp. 35-37.

<sup>139</sup> - Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Tarīkh*, I, p. 4 (سوء المنقلب)

<sup>140</sup> - Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Tarīkh*, I, p. 4

himself did not say that in the Bible.<sup>142</sup> In another point he refers to the collecting of the Qur'ān, by saying “the caliph ‘Uthmān collected the long surās with the long ones and the short with the short ones”.<sup>143</sup> This statement is a paradoxical one. It may reflect his ignorance of the collection of the Qur'ān, or equally it could be an allusive attack on the Muslim sacred book.

He alluded to other polemical book, which he wrote, called *the book of the debates between the Christian and the heretic*.<sup>144</sup> Yet one cannot surely identify the non-Christian interlocutor with whom he debated, but presumably he was a virtual Jews rival, though the dialogue itself reflected the Muslim objections.

His known surviving theological book called, *Kitāb al-burhān*, (book of the evidence), in which he did not deal with Islam directly, but his arguments indicate some kind of Christian reply to the Muslim objects against Christianity and Christian dogma. Remarkably he quoted verbatim some expressions from the Qur'ān and used them in his debate without referring to their origin.<sup>145</sup>

The core theme of the book is defending the Christian faith against objections of the others. These objections seem as a part of the current Christian-Muslim debates in the tenth century. Obviously he put the Muslim (and Jewish) objections in his mind, while writing his verbose treatise. He defended the Trinity, using evidences from the Bible and a few rational arguments, using the classical example of the sun and its light as multiple and one at the same time.<sup>146</sup> While he denied the attribution of God, and asserted that the human mind is not able to recognise the Mighty God,

<sup>141</sup> - Euty chius, Sa'Id b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Tarīkh*, I, pp. 174-175.

<sup>142</sup> - See of the Muslim apologists: al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīṭ dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, pp. 111-115.

See the discussion of A. al-sharfi, *al-Fikr al-islami fī al-radd 'ala al-Nasārā*, pp. 313-334.

<sup>143</sup> - Euty chius, Sa'Id b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Tarīkh*, II, p. 32 (جمع الطوال مع الطوال و القصار مع القصار)

<sup>144</sup> - Euty chius, Sa'Id b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Tarīkh*, I, p. 176 (كتاب جدال بين المخالف و النصراني)

<sup>145</sup> - See for example, Euty chius, Sa'Id b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, I, p. 102.

<sup>146</sup> - Euty chius, Sa'Id b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, I, p. 27-28, 32-34.

who is beyond our knowledge.<sup>147</sup> He tried to explain the stories of the Old Testament in which God appears in person to some prophets and even wrestles against one of them.<sup>148</sup> This specific point seems to have been noticed relatively late by the Muslim theologians in their debates against Christianity,<sup>149</sup> and ever since became one of the cornerstones of the modern Muslim polemic.

Obviously, the main aim of the whole treatise was defending the divinity of Christ, and explaining the nature of the Word of God as God himself.<sup>150</sup> Concerning the Trinity, he devoted a large part of this book trying to explain it and answering the Muslim objections against Christian dogma. Furthermore he warned his audiences (mostly Christians) not to think of any material world when trying to understand the birth of the son from the Father.

It is clear that, he addressed Christian and non-Christian readers in his book. There are several responses to some traditional Muslim objections against Christian dogma. Yet he was extremely cautious not to name Muslims. Only in few cases he used the comparison between the Christian (he called him: the believer **المؤمن**) and non-Christian (whom he called, the dissident **المخالف**).

Presumably, he was aware of the theological debates not only between Muslims and Christians, but also between the Muslim intellectual and religious schools. He turned to the issue of the free will and predestination,<sup>151</sup> which was one of the intellectual themes of his time between Muslim thinkers. He asserted the absolute free will and choice of the mankind for their action. Yet he aptly avoided any allusion to the Muslim trends but his discussion reflect his awareness of the theological debates of his time. He denied the Muslim notion of the Bible's

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<sup>147</sup> - Euty chius, Sa'Id b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, I, p. 7-9.

<sup>148</sup> - Euty chius, Sa'Id b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, I, p. 18; See Genesis, 32: 24-30.

<sup>149</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fīṣal*, I, p. 148; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, p.303.

<sup>150</sup> - Euty chius, Sa'Id b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, I, p. 25-26.

foretelling of Mohammed as a Paraclete, whom Christ promised his disciples. Eutychius assured that it is not a body but an invisible spirit.<sup>152</sup> Remarkably he used some expression or even verses from the Qur'ān,<sup>153</sup> which indicates his knowledge of the Muslim sacred book.

Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭakī, in his history there is no glimpse or hint of polemical orientation. Furthermore, there are no comments even indirectly against Muslim creed or Muslim rulers. This attitude is clearly understandable from an Arab Christian-Melkite writer, who is writing in Arabic and within the Muslim realm, although he spent his last years in Antioch under the Byzantine rule. Yet he paid special attention to the affairs of his sect and their problems with Muslim sovereigns, but explicitly he was extremely cautious not to show his personal attitude not only against Muslims but also generally in the events he dealt with. It is worth noting here that an alleged polemical two works have been attributed to Yahyā, one against Jews and the other one entitled "A treatise on replying to the Muslims" and it is thought that they are now in private possessions in Aleppo.<sup>154</sup>

Sulaymān al-Ghazi, a Melkite poet and bishop of Ghazza (10-11<sup>th</sup>. Century). Like most of the polemicists, this figure and his life are almost hazy.<sup>155</sup> Sulaymān had a divan, and some fragments of writings. His poetry is characterised deeply by his identity as a Christian-Melkite. He alluded to the life of his sect during al-Ḥākim's reign and bitterly portrayed their suffering under the capricious Muslim ruler, though

<sup>151</sup> - Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, I, pp. 56-60.

<sup>152</sup> - Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, I, p. 140.

<sup>153</sup> - See for example: Eutychius, Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, II, p. 91, 96 (مالك يوم الدين); p. 102 (قول الحق الذي فيه يمترون) Qur'ān, 19, 34. It is noteworthy that, this particular verse speaks about Jesus and is a part of section, which refutes the Christian notion on Christ.

<sup>154</sup> -R. Gaspar et al., 'Bibliographie du Dialogue islamo-chrétien' *Islamochristiana*, 2 (1976) p. 202; G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 2, p. 51; Harper Forsyth, J., *The Byzantine-Arab chroniclei*, I, p. 21.

<sup>155</sup> -On his life and works see the big introduction of his works in one single volume by his editor N. Edelby, in which he summaries every possible allusions to the poet and his life. Nevertheless there are still some gaps to be filled and some questions to be answered.

he did not mention his name. In several poems of his *divan*, he defends his faith considerably against those who deny the divinity of Christ. Yet he announced repeatedly that his adversaries are the Jews, but on the background of the whole poems, one can see clearly the repercussions of the Muslims-Christian dialogues. He dedicated almost the whole work to chant the miracles of Jesus, which could be considered without exaggeration as the main aim and feature of the whole *divan*.

Of the entire *divan*, which consisted of 71 poems, he devoted only one poem (n. 51), as a dialogue with non-Christians, yet he did not allude to their identity, but one can assume that they are both Muslims and Jews. In that unique poem he discussed several issues of the current Christian-Muslim polemic. First he defended the divinity of Christ,<sup>156</sup> presumably against the Muslims' (or the Jews?) question, then he turned to the issue of the Trinity and strongly denied that Christian worship three Gods,<sup>157</sup> soon he answered their questions on the Eucharist, veneration of the cross and the icons.<sup>158</sup> Notwithstanding, he devoted a considerable part of his poetry to anti-Jewish polemic, but he evidently avoided any kind of polemic against Islam, which would jeopardise his life since he was living in the realm of Islam. Albeit, he did not allude to Islam, but at the same time he could not hide his sympathy with Byzantium. In two rare cases, the poet shows his approbation of Byzantium, first he praised the Christian kings (of Byzantium), who left the swords and shields to others, carry their crosses and visit the sacred places in Jerusalem,<sup>159</sup> and prayed with their folk in the churches.<sup>160</sup> However, in one exceptional case he attacked Muslims directly and called them infidels who controlled the Christian sacred places in

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<sup>156</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazī, *al-Dīwān*, p. 295, N.3.

<sup>157</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazī, *al-Dīwān*, p. 296, N.6-7.

<sup>158</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazī, *al-Dīwān*, p. 298-299.

<sup>159</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazī, *al-Dīwān*, pp. 167-168. The poet here are confused, first he mentions the kings of the Rūm by name (ملوك الروم) but in the next verses he speaks of them as visitors to



Jerusalem, which he considered still a part of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>161</sup> On another occasion he rejected the Muslim objection of the divinity of Christ,<sup>162</sup> by quoting the Qur'ānic verse, which speaks of Jesus as spirit of God.<sup>163</sup>

On the other hand, he composed some short theological treatises, in which he shows more eloquences than in his poor *divan*. In these treatises, like his *divan*, he tried to give support to his Christian readers. Mostly he had in mind the objections of the Muslims and Jews against Christianity, and on that ground he wrote his works. Similarly he avoided carefully any direct allusion against Muslim or their religion. In one case he quoted verbatim from Elias of Nisibis, and carefully omitted the word 'Muslims' from the original text. In another case he invented a Christian heretic that he called Fūqa, and attributed to him a theory, which denies absolutely that Christ was crucified or killed, but his enemies were confused thought they killed him. This alleged Christian heresy is more or less the Muslim notion on Christ's crucifixion.<sup>164</sup> As the editor pointed out such a notion was not listed among the Christian heresies, which were forbidden in the sixth council, as Sulaymān claims.<sup>165</sup> Finally, yet interestingly, there is an alleged missing manuscript attributed to Sulaymān of Ghazza, which is supposed to be a letter to a certain Muslim cleric, in

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Jerusalem, who returned back to their countries, which seems mostly as normal Christian pilgrims not Byzantine kings.

<sup>160</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazi, *al-Dīwān*, p. 257.

<sup>161</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazi, *al-Dīwān*, p. 362.

صهيون هي لذوي الإيمان عامرة للملك، وهي من الكفار تنهب

Ṣihūn (Jerusalem) is flourishing for the faithful and the king, while being sacked by the infidels.

The editor N. Edelby pointed out (note 43) that this verse refers to the reign of al-Ḥakim. Ṣihūn is the southern district of Jerusalem, p. 375, note. 1.

<sup>162</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazi, *al-Dīwān*, p. 149.

<sup>163</sup> - "Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more) an apostle of Allah, and His word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him" Qur'ān, 4: 171.

<sup>164</sup> - "They killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts with no (certain knowledge), but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety the killed him not" Qur'ān, 4: 157.

<sup>165</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazi, *al-Dīwān*, *Écrits théologiques en prose*, pp. 68-69. See also the editor's note, No. 100, 115.

which the Melkite writer defended Christianity and rejected Islam and Islamic claims<sup>166</sup>.

In all probability, his poetry and theological treatises reflect some knowledge of the Qur'ān. His language and style was clearly influenced by the Qur'ānic style and the poet borrowed some expressions from the sacred book of Muslims.<sup>167</sup> Presumably his knowledge of the Muslim book derived from the Muslim cultural milieu or equally he could have personal acquaintance of the Muslim sacred book.

To sum up, Byzantine polemic and Melkite polemic both faced Islam from an extremely different approach. The only common facts between them, in this context, are their readers, and their intensive employment of the Bible. Certainly both of them aimed at a Christian simple-minded reader, (or listener) who hated Islam and was poorly acquainted with Islam as a religion. On the other hand, there were not many rational debates from both of them, comparing with the Islamic theology. While Muslim thinkers, as we will see in the next chapter, tend to use rational arguments, and are less dependent on the Qur'ānic references, the Christian apologists, Byzantine and Melkites, draw heavily on the Bible, using it mostly as the final and unquestionable word, to prove or disprove their foes' arguments. On the other hand, the Byzantine writings were mostly aggressive, had sharp language, and paid special attention to the personality of Muḥammad, while the Melkite theologians were living under Muslim rule and certainly any similar writings would cost them much suffering. Consequently their polemic was mostly soft, indirect, and predominantly

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<sup>166</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazī, *al-Dīwān, Écrites théologiques en prose*, p. 194.

<sup>167</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghazī, *al-Dīwān*, p. 55, 126, no. 7 (وكتلها زكريا) p. 49, 55, 149, 386, 398; Idem, *Écrites théologiques en prose*, p. 114.

was not more than a spiritual support for a Christian Melikite reader who faced both Muslims and other Christian sects in his daily life.

## Chapter Five

### Islamic polemic against Byzantium: A historical evaluation

#### The growth of Islamic anti-Christian polemic

While the Byzantine-Muslim relations had been deeply characterised by religious aspects since the earliest military clash during the life of Muḥammad himself, Muslim polemic against Christianity in general and against Byzantium in particular, took at least two centuries before it elaborated itself to the final form which we know today. Accordingly, Muslim acquaintance with Christianity and the Christian creed seems to begin relatively late as well.<sup>1</sup> This judgement is certainly a conjectural, as we do not have any surviving written texts from the first two Muslim centuries, although the existence of such works seems to be certain, as we shall see.

However, it could be argued that the Muslim anti-Christian polemic begins with the Qur'ān. To some extent, the Qur'ān was the first Muslim polemical text of any kind. It announces Islam as the only right and final religion, and heralds Muḥammad as the last prophet for mankind. At the same time it challenges both Christians and Jews, refutes their creeds and accuses them of altering their sacred books. As for Christianity, the Qur'ān devotes only 220 verses of a total of 6,236 to the discussions for (and against) it.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, Muslim apologists did not always follow the lead and pattern of the Qur'ān in their polemical encounters with Christianity. They tried to use logical and rational arguments with their adversaries, as well as quoting from the Qur'ānic verses to some extent.

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<sup>1</sup> - There is a recent interesting study on this topic, J. Waardenburg, 'Muslim studies of other religions: the medieval period', in G. Gelder and Ed de Moor (eds.) *The Middle East and Europe: Encounters and exchanges* (Amsterdam- Atlanta 1992).

<sup>2</sup> - A. al-Sharfi, *al-Fikr al-islamī*, pp. 114-121. See for more details, chapter I, pp. 56-61.

On the other hand, in the prophet Muḥammad's sīra (life), and Ḥadīth, there were some encounters with Christians,<sup>3</sup> as well as several sayings attributed to him on relations with non-Muslims. However, the nature and time range of these sayings, as well as the disputes on the authenticity of some of them, require a much-extended work, which lies beyond the limits and scope of this thesis. It is noteworthy however, that some of the Ḥadīths attributed to the prophet were used later in propaganda wars against Byzantium. M. Canard in his article points to these traditions and their employment in the connection with the dream of the conquest of Constantinople. Other similar traditions were elaborated (and may have been invented) in the tenth century to support the Muslim volunteers on the Byzantine-Muslim borders, as has been shown earlier.<sup>4</sup>

Presumably, Muslims were not fully acquainted with the Bible during the first century of Islam. However, the early Muslims apparently sought more information on Christianity from their Christian neighbours, subjects or friends.<sup>5</sup> Although there are some sayings attributed to the prophet which recommend Muslims to avoid reading the Bible, or asking non-Muslims about their religion.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, some of the prophet's disciples did not approve this new trend of studying the Bible; Ibn 'Abbās (the cousin of the prophet and one of the early Muslim authorities) condemned those who asked ahl al-kitāb, and interestingly pointed out that none of the Christians or

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<sup>3</sup> - Supra. Ch. I. p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> - Supra Ch.2, pp. 119-120.

<sup>5</sup> - See for example, Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, p. 33. He says that he asked a certain Arab Christian, for whom he shows considerable respect, about the books of the Christians, which appeared in the Arabic tongue (i.e. translated into Arabic).

<sup>6</sup> - There is a Ḥadīth, narrated several times in similar words. It says that 'Umar I, brought some pages from the Torah (in other narratives one of his Jewish friends has translated them for him); as the prophet stayed silent, 'Umar began to read, while the face of the prophet coloured with anger. Abū Bakr soon stopped 'Umar and drew his attention to prophet's angry face. So 'Umar stopped immediately, while the prophet said, "If Moses was alive he would follow me". Sunan al-Darmī, *kitab al-Muqaddimah*, n. 436; Musnad Aḥmad, Musnad al-Makīn, n. 15303, Musnad al-Kufīn, n., 17613. Encyclopaedia of Ḥadīth, CD. Rom edition, ver. 1,1, (Cairo 1991-1996); Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fisal*, I, p. 216.

Jews asked about the Qur'ān.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Ibn al-Nidīm severely criticised the prominent historian Ibn Ishāq (d. 797 A.D/150 H.) for copying from non-Muslim books and calling Christian and Jews ahl al-'ilim (people of the knowledge).<sup>8</sup>

These early objections against the knowledge of Christianity have vanished gradually, for it is known that some prominent members of the Umayyad family had intellectual contacts with their Christian subjects. Khālīd b. Yazīd b. Mu'āwīya (d. 704 /85 H.) the grandson of Mu'āwīya I, was a disciple of a Christian Melkite monk, who taught him medicine.<sup>9</sup> According to Ibn al-Nadīm, he gathered a group of philosophers from Egypt, who knew Greek and Coptic and entrusted them to translate some books, apparently of philosophy; this was the first translation in Islam.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Ibn al-Muqaffā' the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria, narrates that a son of the governor of Egypt, 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān (father of 'Umar II), sought to learn about Christian writings, investigating their attitude towards Islam, and some evil (sic) priests helped him to translate the Coptic texts.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, there are some indications of the existence of an Arabic copy, or at least Arabic fragments, of the Bible in the first Muslim century.<sup>12</sup> And some early Muslim religious writings did reflect some knowledge of the Bible.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, the growth of the Muslim *kalām*,<sup>14</sup> had reached its climax by the first decades of the ninth/third century, though some modern Arab scholars tend to

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<sup>7</sup> - Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, 9, p. 136, 187.

<sup>8</sup> - Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> - Ibn Khlikān, *Wafyāt*, II, p. 2

<sup>10</sup> - Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, p. 242.

<sup>11</sup> - Severus b. al-Muqaffā', *Tārīkh*, I: 2, p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> - C. Brokelman, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, 4, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> - Al-Sharfī, *al-fikr al-Islām*, pp. 408-409. Idem, 'Christianity in the Qur'ān commentary of Tabari', *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980) pp. 105- 148

<sup>14</sup> - Kalām an Arabic word literally means speech or words, but in particular it means speculative theology, or the discussions in matters of the creed, principally the attributes of God. Gradually it distinguished itself from the Muslim traditional *fiqh*, focusing on the principles of faith, such as the Being and Attributes of God, using rational arguments, even beyond the boundary of the Qur'ān, to debate with others as well as to confirm the faith. See Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqddimah*, p. 458; M. Adel

set it back to the prophet's time,<sup>15</sup> while some Western writers tend to give a greater importance to the Christian influence on the origins of *kalam*.<sup>16</sup> However, without going here into a lengthy discussion of any foreign influences on the Muslim *Kalam*, what is of particular importance is the coincidence and parallelism between three main factors, which coloured the Islamic cultural milieu in the ninth century. These are the climax of Muslim *kalam*; the awareness and employment of Greek logic; and the Muslims' gradual attainment of a comprehensive knowledge of the Christian creed, chiefly the Trinity, which was more or less related to the Muslim debates on the attributes of God.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the early Muslim *kalam* at first, like the knowledge of the Bible, met a sceptical and hostile attitude from the early Muslim authorities.<sup>18</sup> Though these objections were gradually overturned, up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century there were several authorities who forbade the *kalam*.<sup>19</sup>

Presumably after the first century of Islamic history, the Muslim knowledge of the Bible became more detailed and gradually became more deeply rooted in early Muslim theological and intellectual works. The first known polemical work by a Muslim hand, now lost,<sup>20</sup> was written by Ḍirār b. 'Amr al-Qāḍī (d. 806/ 190 H.). But according to 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, there were several other early Muslim attempts directed

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Haleem, 'Early Kalam' in S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman, (eds.) *History of Islamic philosophy*, part I (London 1996) pp.71-88.

<sup>15</sup> - M. A. Haleem, 'Early Kalam', pp. 71-88.

<sup>16</sup> -M. A. Cook, 'The origins of Kalam', *BSOAS* 43 (1980) pp. 32-43. See also, F.E. Peters, 'The Greek and Syriac background', in S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman, (eds) *History of Islamic philosophy*, part I, pp.40-51.

<sup>17</sup> - For more discussions see H. A. Wolfson, 'The Muslim attributes and the Christian Trinity', *HTR*, 49 (1956) pp. 1-18.

<sup>18</sup> - Some of the prominent early Muslim scholars did not welcome the discussions on God's attributes and considered these as innovations. Imam Malik b. Anas (d. 179/795) had been asked about God on the throne, and after a long silence he answered " God's rising above the throne is known, but the state is unknown and the belief (in it) is obligatory, and the question about it is innovation., and I think you are a Zindīq; and the Imam said 'pull him out of the mosque'. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya*, III, p. 126.

<sup>19</sup> - Both Abū 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Bar (d. 1071/463H.) 'Abd Allah al-Anṣārī al-Harwī (d. 1088A.D./481H.) and Muwafaq al-Dīn al-Maqdisī (d. 1223A.D./620H.) composed of book against *kalam*. Badwī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Mazāhib al-Islamīn* (the Muslim sects) 2 vols, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Beirut 1983) I, p. 15.

against the Christians. In his introduction 'Alī al-Ṭabarī severely criticized these works for lacking any clear understanding of Christianity and Christian people, and of using poetry or complicated language to address the Christians. Unfortunately we do not have the full texts of any early Muslim works, and hence one cannot judge these early books and examine their aims and styles. Thus, leaving aside the highly disputed letter attributed erroneously to the caliph 'Umar II, the letter of Hārūn al-Raṣhīd addressed to the emperor Constantine VI stands as the first known Muslim polemical work directed against Byzantium.

Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār narrates that some Christians who converted to Islam began to use their previous knowledge in refuting Christianity<sup>21</sup>. The only well-known example is 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, who converted to Islam and devoted his knowledge to the defence of Islam and the refutation of Christian dogmas. Likewise the prominent writer Qudāmah b. Ja'far, who was a Christian and converted to Islam in 10<sup>th</sup> century, composed a book called the art of the dialectics.<sup>22</sup> Though is missing but presumably he used his knowledge as a former Christian.

In the light of the daily contacts between Muslims and their Christian subjects, as well as the fierce struggle against Byzantium, which was characterised by religious zeal, one may ask, why did it take almost two centuries for Muslim thinkers to produce any kind of polemical work against Christians and Jews? The first possibility is without doubt the recommendations of the prophet and some of his close disciples not to read the Bible or seek knowledge from Christians and Jews. The second generation of Muslim scholars seemingly looked with suspicion upon the *kalam* and philosophical discussions of faith.

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<sup>20</sup> - R. Caspar et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien', *Islamochristiana* I (1979) p. 143.

<sup>21</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīr dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> - Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, p. 130



For their part, early Muslim theologians found some difficulties in examining the Christian dogma. It is interesting to note the comments of al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār on the difficulties facing the Muslims, even the thinkers among them, in acquainting the complex Christian dogmas.<sup>23</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ agrees, saying “Even if one were to exert all one’s zeal and summon all one’s intellectual resources with a view to learning the Christian teachings about Jesus, one would still fail to comprehend the nature of Christianity, especially its doctrine concerning the Divinity. How in the world can one succeed in grasping this doctrine?”<sup>24</sup> Though his aim here was to devalue the Christian dogma, his words still reflect the struggle which early Muslim theologians had in their initial encounters with the Bible and the Christian creed.

The long process of the conquest and establishing a new governmental system in the conquered lands made the Arabs a military aristocracy in their expanding empire. Furthermore, as M. Shaban points out, the Arabs set themselves apart from the conquered populations; this segregation led to a virtual separation between them and their subjects.<sup>25</sup> The cultural milieu of the Islamic empire presumably was affected by this separation of Arabs from non-Arabs. Accordingly, the knowledge of other languages, as well as other religions, began slowly in the first two Muslim centuries. It is no surprise that al-Mas‘ūdī and other Muslim writers realised that the Umayyads caliphate was Arabic in nature and power.

When the black Abbasid banners emerged out of Persia, and the political capital of the Muslim world moved to Baghdad, just in the shadow of Persian culture and with the crucial help of Persian supporters, it marked a new political as well as intellectual watershed in Muslim history. In field of culture, the early ‘Abbasīd era

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<sup>23</sup> - Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 92.

<sup>24</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 22. English trans. J. Finkel, reprinted in N. Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, p. 709

witnessed the conversion of several non-Arabs. Those newly converted Muslims embraced Islam from different cultural and religious backgrounds. They included Christians, Magi, Manichaeans, Jews and pagans. The vivid Muslim cultural milieu successfully assimilated these different sects and trends into its intellectual renaissance. In return these elements pumped more new blood to veins of the growing Muslim civilization. Accordingly most of the greatest Muslim scholars in the ninth and tenth centuries were non-Arabs.<sup>26</sup> However, some of those newly converted elements also influenced the Muslim culture for the worse. According to al-Jāhiz's theory, they were the main sources of the waves of heresy in Islam.<sup>27</sup> Indeed some heresies in Islamic realm introduced elements of Christian or Magi origin.<sup>28</sup>

In a word, by the reign of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861AD/ 232-247H.) the Muslim caliphate appeared a hotbed of all kinds of heretics. The caliphs felt the pronounced effects of these heresies on religious and social life and even on the political situation of their realms. At the same time the increasing daily debates between Muslims and Christians, as well as between the different Muslim sects may

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<sup>25</sup> -M. A. Shaban, *Islamic history (A.D. 600-750 A.H. 132): a new interpretation* (Cambridge 1971) 1, p. 169.

<sup>26</sup> - E.g. al-Ṭabarī and al-Bukhārī.

<sup>27</sup> - See the comments of al-Jāhiz on those new converts of Christian origin who introduced heretical ideas and spread them among the Muslim laity. He says " Is it not a fact that the majority of those who were executed for parading as Muslims, while hypocrites at heart, were men whose fathers and mothers were Christians? Even the people who are under suspicion today have come mostly from their ranks". Some other Muslim scholars attribute the introduction of the problem of predestination and the creation of the Qur'ān, to Christians or Jews who converted to Islam and deliberately imitated such discussions. Al-Jāhiz, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 17. English trans. J. Finkel, reprinted in N. Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, p. 704.

<sup>28</sup> - Among them there are two sects, al-Ḥāyṭāh (الحايطة) and al-Ḥadṭhyah (الحدثية), who claimed that the universe has two creators, the first the eternal God and the second Jesus. They also alleged that it is Jesus who will be the judge of the world in the Day of Judgment. Apparently they accepted the prophethood of Muḥammad. Another example of the Christian effect on Muslim heresies is that the ruthless and corrupt group of al-Qaramiṭah borrowed some elements of Christian doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit. In one of their first propagation letters, they described their leader "He is the preacher of Christ, that is Jesus, and he is the Word, and the mahdī ... and Jesus came to him, in human form and told him: You are the Holy Spirit and the final word". Ibn al-Aṭhīr, *al-kāmil*, 6, p. 69; al-Maqrīzī, *Itt'āz*, 1, p. 153; 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Bighdādī, *kitāb al-milal wa al-niḥal*, (book of the religions and sects) ed. A. Nadir (Beirut 1986) p. 115.

have produced unrest in the society, or even clashes between adherents which jeopardised Baghdad itself from time to time.

This spiritual unrest coincided with the growth of power of the Turkish military elements and the steady decline of the caliphs' power, as well as their personal prestige. Accordingly, some caliphs began arrangements to suppress most of these heresies, as well as banning all kinds of discussions on matters of creed, or even the selling of books of philosophy, *kalam* and magic.<sup>29</sup> Obviously, these arrangements coincided with the harsh treatment meted out to non-Muslim subjects, which began to occur in the second Abbasid era.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the caliphate appeared keener than before to sponsor and encourage Muslim polemic against Christianity.<sup>31</sup>

One may add that the piety and personal desire of some caliphs to follow the lead of the prophet and to comply with the Qur'ānic injunction to invite non-Muslims to accept Islam<sup>32</sup> helped more or less to fasten Muslim polemic against Byzantium, or at least the official branch of this polemic.

#### 'Alī al-Ṭabarī (c. 855 A.D.)

In spite of the importance of the works of 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī, he did not enjoy any considerable reputation among the Muslim elite thinkers in Baghdad. Surprisingly, Ibn al-Nadīm gives a list of his books, which were mainly on medicine, but omits his famous polemical work *kitāb al-dīn wa al-dawlah*.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore most of the late Muslim historians, and theologians do not refer at all to this book, or make

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<sup>29</sup> -The caliph al-Mutawakkil issued a public order banning any kind of debates concerning the Qur'ān. Furthermore the caliph sent these decrees to his governors to apply them over his entire caliphate. Later his son al-Mu'tamid issued in 892/ 279 H. a similar ban and forced the booksellers to swear that they would never sell any books of philosophy or *kalam* or magic. Just a few years later in 897 AD./284 H another decree confirmed the prohibition of any kind of debates. Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 2, p. 592; al-Kindī, *Kitāb 'Umarā' Miṣr*, *The Governors and judges of Egypt*, p. 197; al-Ṭabarī, III: 4, p. 213; Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 151.

<sup>30</sup> - T. Arnold, *The preaching of Islam*, p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> - On the state sponsorship of the polemic see next chapter, pp. 305-313.

<sup>32</sup> -Qur'ān, 16:125; 41:33.

<sup>33</sup> - Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, p 296.

substantial use of it. It seems that the book or the copies of it were not known in the Islamic milieu, or, which is more likely, were not approved or recommended by the Muslim thinkers. One can assume however, that the structure of the cultured Muslim elite in Baghdad was formed of chains of teachers and disciples. Those disciples usually make a proper propaganda for their Shaykhs (teachers) and their works, which soon began to be used, copied and distributed on a wide scale all over Islam. We learn that ‘Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī converted to Islam in his late seventies.<sup>34</sup> This fact, one may suppose, put him out of the traditional Muslim chain of authority, and certainly accounts for his obscurity among Muslim thinkers. Furthermore, his conversion to Islam would undoubtedly provoke the Arab Christian writers, and they at least would not have cared to copy or preserve his works, even the medical ones.

‘Alī al-Ṭabarī certainly makes a watershed in the Muslim knowledge of the Bible; he offers the Muslim theologians a closer look at the Bible, or at least encourages them to reread the books of the Christians. Though we have an earlier Muslim text which shows a considerable knowledge of the Bible,<sup>35</sup> the efforts of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī were a turning point in the Muslim understanding of the Christian text.

‘Alī al-Ṭabarī composed two works; a short treatise addressing the Christians, in which he refutes the trinity and the divinity of Christ, on the basis only of a careful study of the Bible. His Biblical quotations are slightly inexact, obviously he changed some words here or there, but without altering the meaning, and his references to chapters contain some insignificant mistakes as well. The other, longer, treatise is *kitāb al-dīn wa al-dawlah*, which shows clear traces of the caliph, and includes more direct quotations from the Qur’ān, than in his first treatise, where they are rare.

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<sup>34</sup> - ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *al-Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 119.

<sup>35</sup> - See Ibn Abi al-Laith, *Lettre du Calife Hārūn al-Rasīd à l’empereur Constantine VII*, see supra chapter 1.

Unfortunately, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī does not allude to Byzantium or the Byzantine-Muslim struggle, but one can find some repercussions of the Byzantine polemic against Islam. He discusses the issue of Muḥammad’s miracles, a main theme in Byzantine polemic and lists several miracles attributed to the prophet. He also touches other issues such as God’s support to Muslims as a proof of the righteousness of their religion.<sup>36</sup> But the main contribution of his writings is the intensive study of the Bible, firstly to disprove the Christian creed and secondly to find and confirm prophecies on Muḥammad in the Bible. Significantly he offers a different interpretation of Daniel’s vision, to support his belief in the prophecy of Muḥammad in the Old Testament; ironically the very same vision was used to support opposite argument against Islam.<sup>37</sup> Another repercussion of the Byzantine polemic can be seen clearly in his enthusiastic defence of the asceticism of the Muslim caliphs and rulers.<sup>38</sup> Although he says that he is defending the prophet disciples, the repercussions of the Byzantine polemic against the materialistic lives of their contemporary Muslims seem clear.<sup>39</sup>

Surprisingly, a careful reading of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī shows some traces of sympathy with his old religion, i.e. Christianity. Firstly, his language is mild in comparison with other Muslim sources; presumably he had his Christian family in his mind when

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<sup>36</sup> -‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, pp. 50-54; English trans. A. Mingana, reprinted N. A. Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian Muslim dialogue*, pp. 611-614.

<sup>37</sup> - For a Christian interpretation of Daniel’s vision and its application on Muslims see Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, p. 339<sup>22-24</sup>, English trans., Mango, p. 47 (in his comment on the caliph ‘Umar I entering Jerusalem); H. Putman, *L’église et l’Islam sous Timothée I (780-823) études sur l’église Nestorienne au temps des premiers ‘Abbāsides avec nouvelle édition et traduction du dialogue entre Timothée et al-Mahdi*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>38</sup> -‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, pp. 54-65

<sup>39</sup> -Pseudo-Methodius, partial English translations in A. Palmer, *The seventh century in the west Syrian chronicles*, pp. 230-242; John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, PG 94, col. 767, English trans. D. Sahas, *John of Damascus, appendix, I, p. 133*; Niketas of Byzantium, *refut.*, PG 105, cols. 720,781; Anna Comnena, *Aléxiad*, ed. B. Leib, II: 10, p. 208, English trans. E.R.A. Sewter, p. 310; See A. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine*, pp. 260-269. It is noteworthy that some Muslim sources narrate that the caliph al-Mutawakkil (benefactor of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī) was fond of wine and had 4,000 concubines. Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 4, p. 90, 116. While Ibn Khaldūn, bitterly criticised al-Mas‘ūdī’s works for their defamation and insinuations, at the same time, he acquitted the early ‘Abbasid caliphs and followed al-Mas‘ūdī in his criticism of the later ‘Abbasids. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqddimah*, pp. 4, 15-17, 206.

writing his texts. Secondly, he accepts the authenticity of the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, and treats the alteration (taḥrīf) of the Bible, which is mentioned in the Qur’ān, as only a matter of Christian misunderstanding, rather any deliberate altering of the text itself. He praises both New and Old Testaments and their “good maxims of morality, remarkable advice, sublime wisdom and excellent parables”.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, he says, “The wicked Zindīqs have abused and employed invective against these books (i.e. the gospels)”.<sup>41</sup> The most striking allusion, however, is that he says he was converted by (الترغيب و الترهيب), that is to say, by carrot and stick.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, in his other book, *al-Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, he says that his conversion in his late seventies was not for the sake of material advantages,<sup>43</sup> which may be an allusion to some honour he may have gained from the caliph.

The vivid and dynamic cultural milieu in the third and fourth Muslim centuries produced several intellectual schools. The differences between these schools and trends soon created a culture of debates and disputes between them. Several Muslim scholars devoted their intellectual works to supporting their views and refuting those of others. From the very core of this milieu, the Muslim anti-Christian polemic grew progressively, and each theologian made substantial use of the work of his predecessors.

My main concern here is to focus on those works which have something to do with Byzantine-Muslim relations, rather than to re-examine all the extent of polemical works, a task which would certainly lie beyond the bounds of this research.

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<sup>40</sup> - ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, p. 46; English trans. A. Mingana, reprinted N. A. Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian Muslim dialogue*, p. 607.

<sup>41</sup> - Idem.

<sup>42</sup> - ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, p. 144; English trans. A. Mingana, reprinted N. A., Newman, *The early Christian Muslim dialogue*, p. 657. It may be noted that Mingana’s translation is not accurate here inasmuch as the Arabic word, الترهيب is not related to the word dissuasion; its precise meaning is intimidation.

<sup>43</sup> - ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *al-radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 119.

## Al-Jāhiz

He is one of the greatest thinkers in all Arabic literature. His unique style, wide range of interests and his sarcastic criticism brought him several admirers as well as severe enemies. He was an active member of the Mu'tazila School in Iraq and a prolific writer.

The importance of al-Jāhiz for us here lies in two facts. Firstly, because he pays special attention to the Byzantine-Muslim struggle, not taking the traditional approach of Muslim historians who listed the annual raids and major activities on the borders, nor the broad polemical treatises of the Muslim theologians which aimed against Christians as a whole as well as what they believed to be infected Muslim sects of the *heretical schools*, but because he brings to light some unique narratives about and allusions to minor and mostly obscure details in the Muslim-Byzantine conflict, thanks to his intellectual curiosity. Secondly, because his anti-Christian treatise was part of the official policy of the caliph al-Mutawakkil, and contains some unique allusions to the Byzantine-Muslim struggle.

The rational and liberal mind of al-Jāhiz, as well as the mild tone of his anti-Christian treatise actuated J. Finkel, his first publisher, to conclude that "he intentionally strengthens the arguments of the Christians in their attacks upon the Qur'ān".<sup>44</sup> This judgement, however, seems absolutely implausible. In the pages upon which Finkel builds his hypothesis from (p. 37 of the text); al-Jāhiz speaks of the paradoxical verses of the Qur'ān which were taken out of context and used by Christians to support their arguments against Muslims.<sup>45</sup> There is no explicit evidence

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<sup>44</sup> - J. Finkel, *A rislā of al-Jāhiz*, reprinted, N. A. Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, p. 698.

<sup>45</sup> - E.g. 'Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians": because amongst these are men devoted to learning (lit. q̄s̄īn= priests) and men who have renounced the world (i.e. monks), and they are not arrogant' Qur'ān, 5, 82; there are several other

whatsoever of any sympathy of al-Jāḥiẓ towards Christianity. Furthermore, the work of al-Jāḥiẓ was written under the guidance of an enthusiastic caliph, who saw himself as a hero of Orthodox Islam, and certainly any sympathy of al-Jāḥiẓ with the cause of Christianity would have cost him the fury of the caliph and waves of criticism from other Muslim theologians.

More important, al-Jāḥiẓ comments on the confusion caused by Christian misunderstanding of some Qur'ānic verses: "You have asked us about our book and what is permissible in our language and our speech; you did not ask us what is acceptable in your language and your speech".<sup>46</sup> One wonders to whom al-Jāḥiẓ is addressing his argument? Certainly they were Christians, but obviously they were not Arabs, as they could not understand Arabic. One may safely assume that he meant the Byzantines, inasmuch as he speaks of Christians in general and is suddenly moved to criticise the Byzantine practice of castration of their children. Obviously he thinks of Christian Arabs together with the Byzantines in this treatise, in which he presumably borrows part of an alleged letter sent to Byzantium. More probably he was aware of some Byzantine polemic against Islam.

As for as this Byzantine polemic is concerned, the Tunisian researcher al-Sharfī cautiously attributes the Muslim anonymous letter addressed to Byzantium and widely known as 'Umar's letter to al-Jāḥiẓ.<sup>47</sup> The only evidence on which he builds his argument is the similarity in language and style. However if one adds the previous allusions in al-Jāḥiẓ's treatise, which address foes who speak a different language, to the evidence of al-Sharfī, it seems safe to assume that al-Jāḥiẓ was involved more or less in Byzantine-Muslim polemic, and he may have been the writer of the

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verses in the Qur'ān which praise the Christians (2:62; 22:17; 5: 69) On the repercussion of these verses on Christian Arabic writings, see Paul de Antioche, pp. 66, 76-77.

<sup>46</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> - A. al-Sharfī, *al-Fikr al-islamī*, pp. 160-161.



anonymous text published by D. Sourdel, which it was suggested could have been the missing "letter of 'Umar II" to the emperor Leo III.<sup>48</sup>

Al-Jāḥiẓ, however, attacks the Byzantines and their treatment of their own children, whom they castrate, in addition to captive Muslim children.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, he bitterly and sarcastically criticises both monks and monasticism in Christianity, attributing it only to the nature of certain lazy individuals who like to live without doing any work as a burden on others.<sup>50</sup>

To sum up, although the anti-Christian treatise of al-Jāḥiẓ is not complete and other polemical works of his are lost, so we have no solid ground on which to stand on judging him, overall he seems not to have made much use either of the Qur'ān or the Bible. He uses his rational argument, coloured with his sarcastic style. Nevertheless, his short bitter comments and valuable allusions are very important, inasmuch as he was not only a highly respected Muslim scholar who spent his life between books and disciples, but he was above all, a prolific writer, a psychological observer, a comic author, standing somewhere between the laity and the elite.

### **Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār**

Like his great predecessor, al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār has a special importance in Byzantine-Muslim polemic. He devoted his various works to supporting his school, the al-Mu'tazila, and made a considerable contribution to Muslim intellectual life, as well as to Muslim anti-Christian polemic. The main theme of his attack against Christianity focuses on the Trinity and the incarnation, in which he uses rational arguments and a few quotations from the Bible.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, he

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<sup>48</sup> - M. Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar: 'Umar's letter re-discovered' pp. 109-157

<sup>49</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, I, p. 59, 80.

<sup>50</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, I, p. 130.

<sup>51</sup> - For a survey of his polemic against Christianity see S. M. Stern, ' 'Abd al-Jabbar's account of how Christ's religion was falsified by the adoption of Roman customs' *JTS*, 19 (1968) pp. 128-185; A.

devotes a huge book to the defence and confirmation of the prophethood of Muḥammad.

The last book, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah* (confirmation of evidences of the prophethood) bears a special importance in Muslim-Byzantine polemic. The writer touches some religious and social issues across the borders between Byzantium and Muslims. He deals with the religious life, the forced conversion of the Muslim prisoners of war, and the Byzantine local propaganda to justify this obligatory conversion and attributes it to some kind of miracle.<sup>52</sup> He seems to be acquainted with Byzantium and Byzantine polemic and dismisses the Byzantine claims of miracles attributed to the so-called true cross on which Jesus was crucified according to the Christian creed.<sup>53</sup> Obviously, copying from al-Jāḥiẓ, he does blame Byzantines for their ruthlessness, as they used to castrate large numbers of Muslim children,<sup>54</sup> while the Byzantine victories in the tenth century are interpreted by 'Abd al-Jabbār as a proof of the spread of Christianity by the sword,<sup>55</sup> refuting the theme which often appears in Christian polemic that Christianity is spread by poor individual apostles.<sup>56</sup>

The Muslim theologian launched a fierce attack against Byzantine women as well as the society in general. He says that the Byzantines accepted prostitution and allowed women, especially unmarried ones, to have affairs even in their family house, and once their baby is born, they carry him to the church and dedicate him to Christ, so the clergy will not only accept him but also pronounce these women virtuous and

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al-Sharfī, *al-Fikr al-islāmī*, pp. 154-159; idem, 'Quotations from apocryphal Gospels in 'Abd al-Jabbār' *JTS*, new series, 18 (1967) pp. 34-57.

<sup>52</sup> -See supra, chapter 2, p. 179, note 122.

<sup>53</sup> - Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 125.

<sup>54</sup> - Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 168.

<sup>55</sup> - Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 183.

<sup>56</sup> - Arethas, *Scripta Minora*, I, p. 235, French trans. A. Abel, La lettre polémique d'Aréthas', p. 357; S. K. Samir, *Une Correspondance islamo-chrétienne*, PO, 40, Fasc. 4, n. 185, p. 178; Paul de Antioche, p. 35; 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-burhān*, ed. M. Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (Beirut 1977), p. 34.

even saintly!<sup>57</sup> He narrates also that Byzantine nuns, used to go to monasteries as well as to remote garrisons to offer themselves to these single men for the sake of God.<sup>58</sup>

Equally, ‘Abd al-Jabbār pays special attention to refuting the miracles which were attributed to the Christian saints. Surprisingly he mingles miracles with magic and wonders sarcastically why Byzantines were not able to breed camels in their lands, although being very keen to do so? And why they did not use their magic to solve such problem.<sup>59</sup>

‘Abd al-Jabbār saw Byzantium as a main factor in the deforming of true Christianity and establishing a false one, which, in his opinion, is far from the religion of Christ. He has a unique theory about the writing of the New Testament. He narrates that the Christians and Jews were living together under Roman rule. The Christians used to complain to the Romans against the Jews. After a while the Romans asked the Christians to leave the Jews and follow the Romans in praying towards the east and eating the same foods, (presumably pork which Jews do not eat). While some of the early Christians followed the Romans, others escaped and took with them the true Bible. The other group, who followed the Romans had to write a new Bible which is the current one, so they recalled whatever they could of the original Bible with some alterations and additions.<sup>60</sup> He attributed a special role in spreading the current corrupt version Christianity, as he sees it, to the emperor Constantine and his mother, Helena.

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<sup>57</sup> -Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwah*, I, pp. 167-168. On the Arabic views of the Byzantine women see N. el-Cheikh, ‘Describing the other to get at the self: Byzantine women in the Arabic sources (8<sup>th</sup>. -11<sup>th</sup>. Centuries)’, *JESHO* 40, 2 (1997) pp. 240-250.

<sup>58</sup> - Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwah*, I, pp. 170-171. Convents had a bad reputation in Arabic literature in general. Several Arab knights and poets alleged the adventures which they had with nuns, either willingly or grudgingly. See al-Jāhīz, *al-Maḥāsīn wa al-aḍād*, pp. 184-185. this attitude may be reflected in a formal edict (undated but apparently it is circa 13 century) to the Melkite patriarch by the authorities in Egypt which warns the monks not to have private meetings with women. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā*, II, p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> -He pointed out that was not because of cold weather because camels are breed in central Asia where it is very cold. Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwah*, I, 178.

<sup>60</sup> -Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwah*, I, pp. 152-153. See the study of S. M. Stern, ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s account of how Christ’s religion was falsified’,

In his theory, Constantine destroyed all the philosophical schools, killed all the pagan thinkers, burnt all their books, and put Christian monks in their place.<sup>61</sup> Afterwards, ‘Abd al-Jabbār says, 318 men gathered at Nicaea and formulated the Christians’ Nicene Creed, and henceforth, Christians began to venerate the cross, eat pork and follow the religion of the Romans.<sup>62</sup> Even the Christian celebration of the Nativity of Christ (Christmas) was, in his theory, a Roman celebration held in January, and taken over by Christians as their own, although the early Christians never celebrated it; that applies also to the Christian fast days, which were taken over from the Romans and al-Şābi’ah.<sup>63</sup> Finally he summarised his theory in these words “The Christians romanised while the Romans did not christianise”.<sup>64</sup> To some extent, the theory of the tenth century Muslim theologian relatively seems to be similar to the doctrines of a newly founded Christian sect.<sup>65</sup>

The accusation made by the Byzantine polemic against Islam appear briefly in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s apology. He says, “The Rum, are the origin of Christianity; they did not find any blemish in the messenger of God (i.e. Muḥammad), peace be upon him, so they blamed him for the sword and women (polygamy). They censure this in him, God prays for him, while they allege that God had Mary as the mother of His son, yet they do not call her a wife”.<sup>66</sup> Another place he undermines the same Byzantine polemic, by referring to the stories of the Old Testament prophets who killed huge number of their enemies, and even did not offer them the chance to pay al-Jizya (poll tax), in return for having freedom of religion as Islam does. He argues that, if Jesus,

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<sup>61</sup> - Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 160-162.

<sup>62</sup> - Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 163.

<sup>63</sup> - Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 164.

<sup>64</sup> - Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 173; the same attitude appeared in late Muslim writings, see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, p. 264.

<sup>65</sup> - The Seventh-day Adventist church, which was established in the second half of the nineteenth century in the United States. The followers of this new church do not eat pork, or celebrate Christmas, and they consider Saturday their Sabbath. See <http://www.adventist.org>.

<sup>66</sup> - Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 173.

the Christian God, had sent all those prophets and accepted their warfare and killings, what is wrong then with Muḥammad's war against non-Muslims, whom he calls the infidels?<sup>67</sup>

### **Al-Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib.**

Among the Byzantine-Muslim polemicists the name of al-Bāqillānī bears a very special importance, for several reasons. He is the only Muslim theologian who faced the Byzantines in Constantinople and it is beyond doubt that he had several debates with Byzantine clerics. Al-Qāḍī 'Iyād, the Moroccan Muslim historian (d. 1150 AD./544H.), compiled the most complete biography of al-Bāqillānī, in which he lists 49 books. Unfortunately the majority of these works are missing. Of great importance of them, is a book called "al-Masā'il al-Qusṭanṣiniyya" (the Constantinopolitan issues) as a by-product of his journey to Constantinople.<sup>68</sup> Regrettably, it seems certain that this no longer exists. Fortunately, however, al-Qāḍī 'Iyād quotes some of al-Bāqillānī's debates in Constantinople. On the other hand, al-Qāḍī 'Iyād also says that al-Bāqillānī was a judge in the Thughūr (the Byzantine-Muslim borders).<sup>69</sup> This means that our theologian was involved, more or less, in military clashes between Byzantines and Muslims as well as in the polemical debates between the Muslims and the Christians.

The text under discussion of the alleged dialogue between the Muslim theologian and Byzantine clergy is certainly of great importance. It is the only surviving direct dialogue between Byzantine and Muslim polemicists. The text of al-Qāḍī 'Iyād says:

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<sup>67</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīṭ dalā'il al-nubwah*, I, p. 188.

<sup>68</sup> - The text of the dialogue is in the manuscript of al-Qāḍī 'Iyād's, *Tartīb al-madārik wa taqrīb al-masālik li ma'rīfat a'lām madhhab al-imām Mālik*, and it was published as an appendix of al-Bāqillānī, *al-tamhīd* (ed. Cairo) pp. 242-259.

<sup>69</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Iyād, p. 243.

‘Aḍaḍ al-Dawlah sent Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyb (al-Bāqillānī), in some of his embassies to the great king of Rūm. He singled him out by this (choice) to show the sublimity of Islam and (his?) repugnance towards Christianity. When he set out, the judge and vizier of ‘Aḍaḍ al-Dawlah said: the horoscope supports your departure. The Judge Abū Bakr asked him what he meant; when he explained his what he meant, he (al-Bāqillānī) replied: I do not believe in it, because all fortune, misfortune, good and evil are in the hands of God Almighty, for the stars never have a whit of capacity ...<sup>70</sup>.

I<sup>71</sup> departed and we went into the lands of Rūm till we reached the king of Rūm in Constantinople. The king was informed about us, and he sent someone to meet us, and he said, ‘Do not enter before the king with your turbans unless you take them off, or wear a light *mandīl*.<sup>72</sup> I said, ‘I will not do this, and will not enter unless I appear dressed my normal clothes; you must accept this or otherwise take my books (the diplomatic letters) read them and give me a reply to them so I can go back’.

The king was told about that, and he said, ‘I would like to know the reason why he rejected my customary treatment of the ambassadors?’ The judge (al-Bāqillānī) was asked about this; he answered ‘I am a man from Muslim scholars and what you desire from us is subservience and self-abasement. But God raised us through Islam and cherished us by our prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him. Also it is a custom of kings that if they send their ambassadors to another king, he will raise and not humiliate them, especially if the ambassador in question is a scholar (min ahl al-‘ilm). and lowering his status would badly affect his reputation among Muslims as well as his stature in God’s eyes. The translator informed the king about

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<sup>70</sup> -Following a short debate on the capacity of God between al-Bāqillānī and this seemingly the formal state judge, in which the latter decline to engage in a debate with a professional such as al-Bāqillānī, however this short dialogue is out of our context here.

<sup>71</sup> - Here suddenly Bāqillānī appears to be the narrator of the story. Presumably al-Qādi ‘Iyād is copying the Bāqillānī’s missing book “al-Masā’ail al-Qusṭanṭīniya” (the Constantinopolitan issues)

<sup>72</sup> - *Mandīl* مندیل from Latin/Greek mantel (e-um, ium) a word which entered Arabic language in pre-Islamic times, presumably through Aramaic, it mainly means kerchief, though it is used with several meanings, one of them being a head’s covering. Presumably, the reluctance of al-Bāqillānī to take off his headgear reflects the Muslim tradition, which consider an uncovered head as disgraceful for learned men. In some instances stripping any man of his turban in public was a kind of punishment. On Mandīl, see EIs. art, ‘Mandīl’.

It is noteworthy that Liudprand of Cremona, in his embassy to Constantinople, complained bitterly that he had been forced to stand before the emperor with uncovered head. Liudprand of Cremona, *The works*, p. 249.

this, and he said: 'Let him and his companions enter as they wish ...'<sup>73</sup> He entered before our great sultan,<sup>74</sup> who is under the authority of the commander of the faithful, and was allowed to have it<sup>75</sup> before our generous sultan,<sup>76</sup> whom almighty God and his prophet ordered us to obey. So why do you refuse this to me when I am a man chosen from Muslim scholars? And if I entered not in my normal guise, as you asked me to do, I would insult the science (al-'ilm) myself, and my reputation among Muslims would vanish. He (the emperor) told his interpreter 'Tell him we accept his excuse and raise his status and his class here, not equal with other ambassadors, but like those who are good and pious. Your king told us about you in his letter; that you are the tongue of Muslims and are their debater, and I wish to know this from you as I have been informed about you from them.' The Qādī (al-Bāqillānī) said: 'as the king wishes'. He (the emperor) said: 'Stay where I have prepared (a place) for you and the meeting will be held later'. The Qādī said: 'So we went to the place which was prepared for us'.<sup>77</sup>

This verbose introduction, which seems to be coloured with exaggeration, if we indeed accept its authenticity, tends to glorify the Muslim theologian and at the same time reflects the favourable treatment of ambassadors between the Byzantine empire and the Muslim world.

The following narrative states:

The Qādī said, 'On Sunday the king sent for me, and said it is a custom for the ambassadors to attend the banquet of the king, so you have to eat our food and not reject our customs. I told his messenger that I am one of the Muslim scholars, and we are not like other military ambassadors who know the traditions on such occasions, and the king knows that the scholars cannot

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<sup>73</sup> -The editors of the text suggests convincingly that the missing part of the text alludes to the treatment of the Byzantine ambassadors who were allowed to meet the Muslim authorities and the caliph himself wearing their own clothes which may have been unacceptable in Muslim custom, presumably crosses or similar Christian symbols. Al-Qādī 'Iyāḍ, p. 252, note 2.

<sup>74</sup> - He referred to 'Aḍaḍ al-Dawlah the Daylamite Būyids the de facto ruler in the Abbasid caliphate, who was theoretically under the authority of the caliph.

<sup>75</sup> - Byzantine clothes or Christian symbols.

<sup>76</sup> - The caliph.

<sup>77</sup> - Al-Qādī 'Iyāḍ, pp. 250-253.

engage in such a thing if they know (sic) (suspect?) something. I am afraid lest his table has pork or something else which God forbids his prophet and Muslims (to eat). The interpreter went and came back saying: The king says to you, there is nothing you will not like on my table or in my food, and I admire what you have said and you are not like other ambassadors, but even greater. What you are afraid of (such as) pork is not presented and a curtain (is drawn) between it and me.<sup>78</sup> However, I went and sat down while the food was being presented. I put out my hand, and pretended to eat, but never ate anything, though there was nothing displeasing on the table.

When the banquet was finished the place was incensed and perfumed, then he (the emperor) said: You claim that one of your prophet's miracles was dividing the moon;<sup>79</sup> what do you say about this? I said we believe that it is true; indeed the moon was seen as cleft asunder in the days of the messenger of God, and those who happened to be there saw it in as such. The king said, 'How is it and all the people did not see this? I said 'Because the people were neither ready nor promised that it would be cleft'. He said, 'And the moon, is there any kinship (sic) between you and the moon?'<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> - The curtain here is certainly a metaphor, the sentence means that offering pork is far from my mind.

<sup>79</sup> -One of the Muslim narratives of Muḥammad's miracles. Some years before his flight, he was walking with some of his disciples on a moonlit night when he met some infidel Arabs who challenged him and asked him why, if he really was a messenger of God, he could not ask God to divide the moon. Soon Muḥammad prayed and everyone present saw that the moon appeared divided, they were even able to see a mountain between the two sides of the moon. The non-Muslim Arabs who saw that said that the magic of Muḥammad had reached between the earth and the sky. Some of the elite Muslim thinkers, such as al-Naẓām (Mu'tzili thinker d. 847 / 232) deeply doubted such a story, while others such as al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār strongly supported the authenticity of it. The Qur'ānic verse "The Hour (of Judgment) is nigh, and the moon is cleft asunder" 54:1 is a paradoxical, for it does not confirm or deny such a miracle, yet it used by some Muslim thinkers such as 'Abd al-Jabbār to confirm the story. However, there are three possible explanations for this verse. 1- Referring to and confirming the previous story, that the moon appeared cleft asunder in Mecca within sight of the prophet, his companions and some non-Muslims; 2- the prophetic past tense indicates the future (as it happens several times in the Qur'ān, (e.g. 39:68-74; 50:20-21) and the cleaving asunder of the moon is a sign of approaching of the Judgment day; 3- that the verse is metaphorical, meaning that the matter became clear as the moon. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī realised that the narrators of this Ḥadith are 3, two of whom were not present in Mecca before the flight. See al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīr dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 55-59; *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, English translation with short comments, revised and edited by the Presidency of Islamic Researches, Iftā, Call and Guidance, (Saudi Arabia 1990); Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bārī fī sharḥ saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (ed. Cairo) 6, p. 730.

Al-Bāqillānī alluded to this narrative very briefly, unusually, without a lengthy discussion. See al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Biyān bayn al-mu'jizāt wa al-karāmāt wa al-ḥayyāl wa al-khānah wa al-Siḥr wa al-narinjāt*, (book of the differences between the miracles, charismata, tricks, divination and the magic) ed. R. J. McCarthy (Beirut 1958) p. 91.

<sup>80</sup> - The Arabic words *نسبة* and *قرابة* applied only to family relations, it seems however the question was a sarcastic comment from the emperor.



Why is that the Rūm and the others did not see<sup>81</sup> it (cleft), but only you? I replied, ‘This story about the table which is circulated among you,<sup>82</sup> is there any relationship between you and it, because only you saw it, not the Jews, Magi, Brahmans, the pagans, and especially your neighbours the Greeks,<sup>83</sup> for all of them deny this; while only you saw it’.

The king confused, said in his own language ‘Glory to God’, and called a certain priest to come and debate with me, saying, ‘we cannot bear him. His master (‘Adad al-Dawlah) said, there is no equal to him in my kingdom, nor among present-day’.<sup>84</sup> Suddenly, a wolfish-looking man, with blonde hair, wearing hair! (Sic); sat down and listened to the issue, and he said ‘What the Muslim says is the truth, and I have no answer except this’. I asked him; ‘Do you say the eclipse of the moon can be seen by all the people on earth or only by those who live in a region, which is parallel to it?’ He replied ‘Only those who are adjacent to it can see it’. I said, ‘Apart from your denial of the fission of the moon; if it was on one side, is it not true that those who are in that side can see it, but only those who are ready to see it, while others who were not ready to see and those who were in places from which they could not see this?’ He said ‘It is as you say; no one can refute this. The controversy comes the narrators who tell the story, but the doubt which is raised is not valid’.

The king said, ‘How could the transmission (of the narrative) be doubted?’ The Christian (priest) said: ‘Such news, if it is indeed true, would be narrated by huge numbers (of people) till it reached us, but since we are not aware of this, we infer that it is factitious and false’. The king turned to me

<sup>81</sup> - The original Arabic word **تعرفه** means ‘know it’.

<sup>82</sup> - Al-Bāqillānī refers to the story of the table, which appears in the Qur’ān (5: 112-115) “ Behold! The disciples said “ O Jesus the son of Mary! Can thy Lord send down to us a table set (with viands) from Heaven? Said Jesus fear Allah, if ye have faith”. John of Damascus referred to this Qur’ānic verse, yet without comment. Some Melkite writers used these verses for a different to refer to the bread and the wine of the Eucharist. Remarkably, they saw them as a confirmation and support to Christianity. John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, PG 94, col. 772; English translation D. Sahas, *John of Damascus, appendix I*, p. 141; Paul de Antioche, pp. 67-68 (Arabic text) p. 175 (French translation). Anonymous, *Summa Theologiae Arabica*, ff. 120-121, cited by S. H. Griffith, ‘Islam and the summa theologiae arabica; Rabī’I 264 A.H.’, p. 251.

<sup>83</sup> -Al-Bāqillānī followed the lead of al-Jāhīz and other Muslim thinkers who saw the Byzantines as simply neighbours of the Greeks, who were admired by the Arabs; and there was no relation whatsoever between these Byzantine and the Greeks, only geographical coincidence.

<sup>84</sup> -This seems to be a later interpolation by a Muslim writer, which reflects the Muslim appreciation of the role played by al-Bāqillānī as the defender of orthodox Islam against non-Muslims and also against other Muslims intellectual schools, which are considered by the Sunni scholars heretics.

and said; ‘The answer!’ I replied, ‘It applies to him in his story of the table, what applies to me in the narrative about the moon. It may be said that, if the story of the table is true, then it would have been narrated by huge numbers; so every Jew, Christian, Pagan would know about this ipso facto, and since they do not, then this equally indicates the story is fabricated’. The Christian was flabbergasted, so was the king, and the meeting was finished at this point.

The Qāḍī said, ‘The king asked me in another audience, ‘What do you say about Jesus, son of Mary, peace be upon him?’<sup>85</sup> I replied, ‘a spirit of God, His word, His servant and His prophet, like Adam, He (God) created him from dust and then said to him ‘Be’, and then I recited the text.’<sup>86</sup> He asked, ‘O Muslim, you said: Christ is a servant!’ I said ‘yes’, and ‘We do’. He said, ‘Do not you say that he is the Son of God? I replied, ‘God forbid, “No son did Allah beget, nor is there any God along with him”’<sup>87</sup> You utter a most dreadful saying; if you make Christ the son of God, who then is his father, brother, grandfather, and his uncle?’<sup>88</sup> And I listed the relatives. Perplexed, he said, ‘O Muslim, can a worshipper create, bring the dead to life, cause death and heal those born blind and the lepers’.<sup>89</sup> I replied, ‘The servant could not do that, but only the Almighty’. He asked, ‘How can Christ be the servant of God and one of his creatures; while performing all these miracles and doing all this?’ I answered, ‘God forbid! Christ never raised the dead, nor healed the blind and lepers’. He became confused and lost patience, and said, ‘O Muslim do you deny this, when it is well known and accepted among people?’ I replied, ‘None of the learned ones said that: the prophets (peace be upon them) performed miracles on their own, but through God and acted as a testimony by the works their hands.’<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> - This sentence (peace be upon him) is certainly of Muslim origin.

<sup>86</sup> - “The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, Then said to him “Be” and he was” Qur’ān, 3:59.

<sup>87</sup> - Qur’ān, 23, 91.

<sup>88</sup> - Al-Bāqillānī presents here the traditional Muslim view on the notion of divine filiation of Christ, which usually does not accept the Christian views on the same issue, but tends to understand it within a human concept.

<sup>89</sup> - Qur’ān: 3: 49. It is certainly implausible that the Byzantine emperor would use the Qur’ānic terminology. Most likely it is a later reediting of the original and missing text of al-Bāqillānī.

<sup>90</sup> - A similar argument is to be found in al-Tamhīd of al-Bāqillānī. See al-Bāqillānī, *al-tamhīd*, (ed. Beirut) p. 98.

He said, ‘Some of your prophet’s offspring and others who are well-known of your religion have come here in my presence, and they said that this is in your book’.<sup>91</sup> I answered back, ‘O king, in our book this is by leave of God, and I recited what is in the Qur’ān “by my leave”<sup>92</sup>. I added, ‘The performance of these miracles is indeed from God’s will alone, with no partner; and if Christ can bring the dead to life, and heal the blind and lepers by himself, then it can be argued that Moses parted the sea and got his hand out without any harm (scar)<sup>93</sup> by his own will; and the miracles of the prophets, peace be upon them, were performed by their actions and will, without the will of the Creator. If this is not accepted, so it is unacceptable to attribute Christ’s miracles to him alone.’

The king said, ‘All the prophets were begging Christ until he answered them. I replied, ‘Are there any bones in the Jews’ tongues (sic), so they cannot say, Christ was praying to Moses? And every prophet’s adherent would say that Christ prays to his prophet. Hence there is no difference between the two cases.

The Qaḍī, God have mercy on him, said, ‘We debated in a third meeting and I asked why the Divine should have united with the human (i.e. in Christ)’. He replied, ‘He wanted to save humans from destruction.’ I asked, ‘Did he know that he would be killed and crucified, and exposed as such? And even so, he took no steps to save Himself from the Jews. If you say he did not know what the Jews intended to impose on him, then indeed he is not a God, or the Son (of God); and if you say he knew and chose to be involved in all this deliberately, then he is not wise, because wisdom prevents one from exposing oneself to death’. He (the emperor) was stunned and that was our last meeting.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> - This is a very important allusion to some previous debates between Byzantines and their Muslim guests or captives, which were alluded by some Muslim sources, such as the prominent poet Abu Firās al-Hamadānī. The stress on his previous Muslim interlocutors’ relationship to the prophet and their high rank as Muslims, eliminate any possible suggestion that his knowledge (or Byzantine knowledge in general) was derived from formal Muslims who converted to Christianity, as claimed by Niketas of Byzantium.

<sup>92</sup> - Qur’ān, 5:110.

<sup>93</sup> - Exodus, 4:6; 14:21-29; cf. Qur’ān, 26: 60-66; 20:22; 27:12; 28:32

<sup>94</sup> - Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, pp. 252-256.

Sometime after these debates, the Muslim cleric was invited apparently to a banquet or celebration, which was attended by the patriarch<sup>95</sup> as well. According to the narrative, the emperor warned the patriarch of the intelligent Muslim ambassador and advised him to display his Christianity,<sup>96</sup> hoping to find a hint of mistakes on the part of the Muslim foe. When the Patriarch entered, al-Bāqillānī greeted him in good manner, and then asked him about his wife and children. Stunned by this rude question, all attendances became frustrated and drew the sign of the cross on their faces. Al-Bāqillānī asked them sarcastically, ‘if you deem this man far above having a wife and children, how dare you to attribute the same thing to almighty God?’ They were stunned by this and deeply respected the imam (al-Bāqillānī). Finally the patriarch advised the emperor to hasten to send back the Muslim evil; otherwise he could not feel that Christianity would be safe, so the king sent him back with a reply and presents of Muslim prisoners of war and some copies of the Qur’ān.<sup>97</sup>

This is clearly not the whole text of the debates between the Muslim scholar and the Byzantine clergy, as the original book “al-Masā’il al-Qusṭanīniyya” (the Constantinopolitan issues) is missing. But the text reflects some genuine aspects of the Byzantine-Muslim polemic; furthermore, there are no alien elements in the texts of the dialogue. Moreover, there are some strong links between the text of the dialogue and other works of al-Bāqillānī.<sup>98</sup> At the same time, the historical background and small details on the protocol of the Byzantine court seem to be accurate. The embassy itself is unquestionable,<sup>99</sup> and the dialogue appears to be

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<sup>95</sup> - He must be Nicholas II Chrysoberges (980-992)

<sup>96</sup> - Presumably, to show signs of Christianity such as crosses.

<sup>97</sup> - Al-Qādī ‘Iyād, p. 256. Apart from the clear exaggeration, it is well-known that Byzantium used to send Muslim prisoners of war, as well as copies of the Muslim sacred book, as presents to pacify Muslim rulers. E.g. al-Ṭabari, III, p. 1931; see A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II, p. 8.

<sup>98</sup> - C.f. al-Bāqillānī, *al-tamhīd*, (ed. Beirut) p. 98.

<sup>99</sup> - Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh madīnat Baghdād*, 5, pp. 379-380; Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū al-Fārj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *akhbār al-adhkiyā’* (Stories of the intellectuals) ed. M. al-Khūlī (Cairo 1970) p.118; Ibn

authentic, yet the surviving portion of the text seems to have been altered by some late Muslim writers, presumably admirers of al-Baqillānī, who wanted to add to his reputation. The tolerant and apparent patience of the Byzantine emperor, if the whole story is to be trusted, can be explained in the light of his desperate need for support of 'Aḍaḍ al-Dawlah.<sup>100</sup>

The striking fact about al-Bāqillānī, that he is the sole Muslim theologian who reportedly debated with Byzantine clerics in Constantinople and devoted most of his writings to defending the Qur'ān against the attacks of others. One wonders whether this a mere coincidence? Or whether his journey and debates there had influenced to some extent his tendency to specialise in the defence of the Muslim sacred book? Furthermore, what is the connection between Niketas of Byzantium and al-Bāqillānī? For Niketas of Byzantium whose dates of birth or deaths are not certain but widely accepted to have been some decades before al-Bāqillānī, and who devoted his relatively lengthy treatise to arguments against the Qur'ān. While the second, al-Bāqillānī, who visited Constantinople several decades later and dedicated most of his writings to arguments defending the same book, the Qur'ān? Still one may wonder, was al-Bāqillānī aware, by any means, of the works of Niketas? The practical answer to such question may be reached through comparative study between the works of each to find any possible common points within the general context of Byzantine-Muslim intellectual and religious relations.

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al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 7, pp. 110-111. On the political background of this mission see W. Farag, *Byzantium and its Muslim neighbours during the reign of Basil II*, pp. 82-99.

<sup>100</sup>. In 982AD/371H. the date of al-Bāqillānī's embassy, the young emperor Basil II faced the disruption of rebellion by his general, Bardas Skleros, who was defeated, by the yet more ambitious general Bardas Phokas see H. F. Amedroz, 'An embassy from Baghdad to the emperor Basil II', *JRAS* (1914) pp. 915-942.

While Niketas, as J. M. Demetriades pointed out, omits the first Sura (chapter) of the Qur'ān,<sup>101</sup> al-Bāqillānī devoted a large chapter of one of his books to defending the authenticity of the so-called Muṣḥaf 'Uṭhmān (the formal and complete copy of the Qur'ān), and resolving the doubts over the authenticity of the first sura of the Qur'ān.<sup>102</sup> Niketas constantly speaks of the Muslim notion of predestination and accuses the Qur'ān of attributing the evil actions (of mankind) to God, as the source of both good and evil equally. Al-Bāqillānī, on his side, challenges all the accusations of the Byzantine theologians and the Muslim sect (al-Qadriyya) and denies that evil actions are attributable to God.<sup>103</sup> Another issue, which Niketas points out and mocks against, is the Muslim practice of pilgrimage,<sup>104</sup> which requires trotting between two small hills called al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah, by the Muslim holy mosque in Mecca.<sup>105</sup> Al-Bāqillānī defends this practice and refutes any accusations against it.<sup>106</sup>

As regards predestination it is well known that the issue (al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar القضاء والقدر) attracted much attention from almost all intellectual sects in Islam.<sup>107</sup> It would not, therefore, be a surprise that both of our writers, Niketas and al-Bāqillānī, dedicate a large part of their argument to the issue of Divine justice and predestination.<sup>108</sup> More important, al-Bāqillānī may refer to the work of Niketas, yet he does not even mention his name, but says "Most of the criticism of it (the Qur'ān),

<sup>101</sup> - J. M. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 20, note 1.

<sup>102</sup> - Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār li'l-Qur'ān*, fols. 177-185.

<sup>103</sup> - Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, pp. 303-327, 334-337; idem, *al-intiṣār lil-Qur'ān* (Justice to the Qur'ān), folios, 446-474, 486-487, 489-500

<sup>104</sup> - Niketas of Byzantium, *refut*, PG 105, col. 720.

<sup>105</sup> - According to the Muslim tradition, this practice is intended to follow the lead of Hagar, when she was left alone in the Meccan desert with her young son. Afraid of a drought and fearful for her son, she began to run between the two hills looking for water. Finally and miraculously, a well revealed itself from under the feet of her son.

<sup>106</sup> - Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, pp 119-121

<sup>107</sup> - For a wider discussion on the predestination, see W. Watt, *Free will and predestination in early Islam* (London 1948); M. B. 'Alavi, *Fatalism, free will and Acquisition: As viewed by the Muslim Sects*, (Lahore 1956); A. Guillaume, 'Some remarks on the free will and predestination in Islam, together with a translation of the Kitabu'l Qadar from Sahih of Bukhari' *JRAS* (1942) 43-63.

<sup>108</sup> - Niketas, *Refut*, PG, 105, cols. 732,757,764,780; al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, pp 287-295, 303-327; Idem, *al-'intiṣār li'l-Qur'ān* (Justice to the Qur'ān), folios. 446-474, 486-487, 489-500.

only occurs because of their (i.e. the critics) ignorance of the meaning or the manner the Arabic speech".<sup>109</sup> Such an important allusion applies precisely to the non-Arab polemicists, presumably the Byzantines with whom the Muslim theologian had certainly debated.

The above comparison does not solve the whole issue nor even give solid ground for a connection between the two men. There are still many verses and issues dealt with by Niketas and simply ignored by al-Bāqillānī. The question of whether the Byzantine clergy who met the Muslim imam made use of Niketas's work is problematic and provides more questions than answers. One may cautiously suppose that the text of Niketas does not seem to exist in the background of the discussions of al-Bāqillānī in Constantinople not forgetting that the text of this dialogue, if we indeed accept its authenticity, is not the complete one and the book written by al-Bāqillānī himself about his discussions in Constantinople is sadly missing. However, it should be noted that both the imam and Niketas wrote their works with a co-religionist reader in mind. Hence any possible connection between their writings seems to be no more than a remote possibility.

#### **Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq (d. 910/ 297)**

Among the Muslim theologians in the ninth/third century stands the unique figure of al-Warrāq. Although his Muslim contemporaries mostly considered him a dangerous heretic,<sup>110</sup> nevertheless, his apologia surpassed most of the Muslim treatises in its deep knowledge of the Christian creed and highly rational

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<sup>109</sup> - Al-Bāqillānī, *'Ijāz al-Qur'ān*, p. 193.

<sup>110</sup> -Among those theologians who considered him a heretic we find the names of Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, though the second made substantial use of al-Warrāq's works. Also al-Matrūdī devoted some pages to refuting the writings of al-Warrāq. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 338; al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 231-232; al-Māturīdī, *kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp186-202.

arguments.<sup>111</sup> In his surviving works there is no single quotation either from the Bible or from the Qur'ān, only rational arguments in a highly eloquent language.

In his treatise, al-Warrāq challenges the Trinity and the differentiations between substance and Hypostasis, showing an accurate knowledge of the Christian creeds, and the differences between the main Christian sects concerning the Trinity and nature of Christ, especially the Melkite (Byzantines), yet he does mention Byzantium or Byzantine polemic or even allude to the Byzantine-Muslim conflict.

### Secular polemic

**Al-Marwazī** (12<sup>th</sup>. Century). What he says about Byzantium and the Byzantine science it is of great importance:

“And so to the sciences and occult philosophies and (other) worthy matters which are attributed to them, do not truly belong to them, but to the Ionian sages who mixed with them and who are celebrated for their thought and the keenness of their intelligence”<sup>112</sup>

Three centuries before al-Marwazī, another Muslim thinker (al-Jāhiz) adopted the same idea that is the distinction between the ancient Greek thinkers, who were admired by the Arabs, and the Byzantines. It was only geographical coincidence which connected the Byzantines with the Greeks.

In his polemical treatise against Christian and Christianity, al-Jāhiz, says:

“It was by chance of geographical proximity that they got hold of the Greek books. Either the authorship of some of the books they falsely ascribed to themselves or they tampered with their contents so as to make them appear Christians”.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> -Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam: Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq's "against the trinity"*, ed. with a parallel English translation, D. Thomas, (Cambridge 1992) introduction of D. Thomas, p. 31.

<sup>112</sup> - Marwazī, see V. Minorsky, 'Marvazi on the Byzantines', p. 458.

<sup>113</sup> - Al-Jāhiz, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 17, English trans. J. Fenkel, reprinted in N.A Newman, *The early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, p. 704.



In this short and extremely important text, the Arab thinker shows that he was aware of the conflict and the contradictions between the Ancient Greek philosophy and logical theories with the teachings of the Bible. Not only this, but he was fully aware of the attempts made to reconcile Christianity with Greek philosophy. Yet, the text goes beyond this to tell us about the religious encounters between the two and the Byzantine attempts to link themselves with the intellectual superiority of the Greeks, and the to extol supremacy of Christianity as a religion over that of the Arabs (i.e. Islam), Jews and Hindus:

They would tell us that they (i.e. the Greeks) were a group of Byzantine tribes and would boast of the superiority of their religion over those of the Jews, Arabs, and Hindus.<sup>114</sup>

This unique text undoubtedly reflects some of the themes of the intellectual, theological, political, challenges and debates between Muslims and Byzantines. Al-Marwazī is trying to argue that these enemies of Islam are not the great thinkers of Greeks or even their successors; it was the chance and the geographical coincidence which made them seem so. He respects the Greek thinkers and appears reluctant to accept the Byzantines as the same people. The same attitude towards Byzantium was espoused by other Muslim thinkers, who distinguished between the Ancient Greeks, whom they admire, and their Byzantine enemies.<sup>115</sup>

### **Literature of war and polemic (poetry and speeches)**

In the propaganda war between Muslims and Byzantines, as well as between Muslim rivals, Arabic poetry plays a crucial role. Poetry undoubtedly was the mass medium of the Arabs. It was used to belittle others, encourage soldiers and volunteers,

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<sup>114</sup> - Al-Jāhiz, *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 17, English trans. J. Fenkel, reprinted in N.A Newman, *The early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, p. 704.

<sup>115</sup> - Ibn Sā'id al-Andalusī, *Kitāb tabaqāt al-Umam*, (book of the categories of the nations) ed. L. Cheikho, (Beirut 1912) p. 35; for a similar view from other Andalusian writers, see M. Marin, 'Rūm in Spanish Muslim Geographers', *Graeco-Arabic* 3 (1984) pp. 109-117.

but above all, to chant the heroic deeds of the emirs or caliphs, and finally, it must be remembered to earn splendid gifts or money such as bestowed to poets. In the Byzantine-Muslim struggle, poetry has always a place.<sup>116</sup> Though the aims and the nature of the poetry as well as the trends of poets themselves, was not always connected with the war or religion, still some verses of Arabic poetry as a whole touched on the religious dispute between the two antagonists.

Al-Mutanabbī praises Sayf al-Dawlah, and alludes to the crucifixion of Christ, wondering how he could push the death from them (the Byzantines), when he himself was killed, according the Byzantine (Christian) creed. His hero appears as the only monotheist to fight against the Byzantine polytheists who worship three Gods. Apart from the obvious exaggeration of the poem, it does show the war as a confrontation between Islam and Christianity, monotheism and polytheism.

They seek help from the one whom they worship

Who, they believe had been crucified.

To protect them from what he already suffered (the death)

O men, how astonishing!!

I see the Muslims against the infidels.<sup>117</sup>

Either impotent or terrorized

You alone are on God's side

Sleepless and endlessly weary

As if you are alone a monotheist

While the rest of the creation believes in a Father and a Son<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> -A full study has been dedicated to Arabic poetry in the Byzantine-Muslim struggle. See N. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Shi'r al-ṣirā' ma'a al-rūm*, (the poetry of the struggle with Rum/ Byzantines), (Amman-Jordan 1977).

<sup>117</sup> - The Byzantines, whom he called the infidels.

<sup>118</sup> - Al-Mutanabbī, pp. 370-373; cited by M. Canard, *Sayf Al Daula: Recueil de texts*, pp. 180- 181.

Again in another poem, he sees his hero not only as a sovereign fighting against other, but also representing monotheism (i.e. Islam) fighting against polytheism.

You are not just a king defeating his counterpart  
But you are the monotheism defeating the polytheism<sup>119</sup>

On another occasion he mocks the decision of a high Byzantine official (Bardas Phokas) to be tonsured and live in a monastery.<sup>120</sup> He also alludes ironically to the cross, when his emir was planning to cross a river. In a highly imaginative and well-constructed verse he says that the ropes for the Muslim fleet were made from the braided hair of Byzantine women while the ships were made from the wood of the crosses.<sup>121</sup>

Sometime earlier, al-Buḥturī alludes to the Muslim attitude view that the Jews and early Christians deliberately altered the Bible to hide the prophecy of Muḥammad. He says in his praise of the emir Yūsif b. Muḥammad.<sup>122</sup>

You imposed upon the Bible and its people

Humiliation, which shows them the glory of the people of the Muṣḥaf.<sup>123</sup>

You embittered it by the shining (swords), but

In fact you pleased it, if it was not distorted.<sup>124</sup>

In these verses, the poet alludes, albeit indirectly, to the Biblical prophecy of Muḥammad. In his notion, if the Bible had not been distorted by the Christians, that

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<sup>119</sup> -Al-Mutanabbī, *Divan*, sharḥ al-Yazji, ed. Y. F. Bad (Beirut 1995) II, p. 836; also cited by M. Canard, *Sayf Al Daula, Recueil de texts*, p. 111.

<sup>120</sup> -Al-Mutanabbī, pp. 306-307; cited by M. Canard, *Sayf Al Daula: Recueil de texts*, p. 111.

<sup>121</sup> -Al-Mutanabbī, *divan*, sharḥ al-Yazji, ed. Y. F. Bad (Beirut 1995) II, p. 792.

<sup>122</sup> -A prominent Muslim emir contributed to the war against Byzantium. The caliph al-Mutawakkil appointed him as a governor of Armenia, but he was ambushed by rebel Armenians and killed in 852 /237 H. al-Tabari, III, 3, pp. 1408-1409.

<sup>123</sup> - Muṣḥaf is derived from the Arabic word ṣaḥīfah, pl. ṣuḥf, which means pieces of parchment or paper for writings: the name Muṣḥaf is derived directly from the verb aṣḥīf (passive) i.e, denoting that some pieces of paper or parchments were collected inside something, that is to say the book which contains the Qur'ān. Accordingly, people of the Muṣḥaf are the Muslims. Al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-saḥāḥ*, (Amman 1996) p. 180.

<sup>124</sup> - Al-Buḥturī, p. 185. Cited by al-Ṣharfī, *al-fikr al-'Islāmī*, p. 455.

is, to hide the prophecy of Muḥammad, other Christians would certainly have followed it and embraced Islam. Accordingly, there would have been no need for more fighting between Muslims and Christians, for the Islamic struggle against the Byzantines, who followed a false Bible is justified in undistorted Bible who supports the prophethood of Muḥammad.

The famous poem of Abū Tammām, in the occasion of the Amorium's campaign (838 A.D./ 223H.) includes some verses which are directed against Christianity and its symbols. The poet links Christian crosses with idols, which is a theme constantly found in Muslim polemic.

If the stars could foretell anything before its time

The fate of idols and crosses would not have been kept hidden<sup>125</sup>

Then he describes Byzantines as idolaters.

You left the fortune of Banū al-Islām ascendant<sup>126</sup>

And in decline the fortune of the idolaters and their abode.

Beside the poetry of the fight against Byzantium, the Arab poets deal with Christians, their religion and religious symbols as well as the monasteries inside the realm of Islam. However, the vast number of scattered hints which relate to Christianity in the Arabic poetry makes it impossible to examine here, especially as it is concerned mainly with Christian Arabs rather than Byzantium.<sup>127</sup>

In sum, for Muslim poets the war against Byzantium was a war of Islam against Christianity. In their language it was a war of monotheism against polytheism. The repercussions of Muslims polemic appear in their poems. Presumably these religious hints in such war-poetry represent the caliph or the emir as a fighter for

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<sup>125</sup> - English translation: S. P. Stetkevych, *Abu Tammam and the poetics of the 'Abbasid age*. (Leiden 1991) p. 188.

<sup>126</sup> - English translation: S. P. Stetkevych, *Abu Tammam*, p. 189.

Islam, and certainly play an unmistakable part in the religious as well as the political prestige of any Muslim sovereign.

### The poem of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī<sup>128</sup>

In the climax of the Byzantine victories over the Muslims in the tenth century, the emperor Nikephoros Phokas challenged the Muslims, using their favourite weapon, poetry. In his lengthy poem the emperor attacks not only the caliph and Muslim rulers but also threatens to spread Christianity all over the world, and to establish a new Christian kingdom in Mecca, the most sacred place in Islam. Whether the poem was indeed written within the territory of Byzantium or not, presumably it had an immediate and deep impact all over the Muslim world. Unfortunately our contemporary Muslim sources do not give a full account of the whole background of this poem, but one assumes that it aroused several Muslims, especially in Khurasan, to volunteer for Jihad against Rum, and inflamed their hearts against the local Christians, especially the Melkites.

The first known Muslim reply to the Byzantine poem was a lengthy poem composed by al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, who was a cleric and Ghazi in the Muslim armies against Byzantium in the tenth century.<sup>129</sup> This poem consists of 74 verses, and is said to have been sent to the emperor Nikephoros Phokas, to refute an Arabic poem sent by him the Abbasid caliph. Al-Subkī records a narrative of a former Muslim prisoner of war ('Abd al-Malik al-Shāshī) who says 'When that poem (of al-Qaffāl) reached Byzantium, the monks there wondered about the Muslim poet (al-Shāshī) and his city, and assured one another that they did not know anyone like him in all the

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<sup>127</sup> - Among this poetry there is a very interesting battle between two poets of the Umayyad period. One of them is a Muslim called Jarīr, and the second a Christian called al-Akhtal. In a series of satirical poems, both of them use religious symbolism.

<sup>128</sup> -Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya*, 2, pp. 181-184.

<sup>129</sup> -On the role of the Muslim clerics in the Byzantine-Muslim struggle, see supra, chapter 2, pp. 115-119.

Muslim realm'.<sup>130</sup> This narrative seems to be nothing more than a hagiographical addition, taking into consideration that the narrator of the story is one of the relatives of the poet and has probably exaggerated the alleged Byzantine reaction to the poem. However, the authenticity of such a narrative cannot be completely dismissed.

Among the 74 verses of the poem there are only 16 which can be considered as polemic. In these verses al-Qaffāl refutes the emperor's claims and touches some polemical issues. He launches a fierce attack against the veneration of the cross and denies the divinity of Jesus, who was, in al-Qaffāl's opinion an ordinary child, being fed by his mother. Al-Qaffāl alluded to the famous story of the *Mandīl* of Jesus, which is considered a divine icon by Christians; surprisingly, the Muslim poet sees Jesus' use of a handkerchief, presumably to wipe away his sweat, as evidence of his human nature. However, al-Qaffāl refers to the biblical prophecy of Muḥammad.<sup>131</sup>

The main theme of the poem is to challenge the threat of the emperor, belittle his victories, and threaten him with the might of the Muslim volunteers (especially al-Qaffāl's fellows, the *Khurasaniti*) who will conquer Constantinople itself and annihilate the Byzantine armies; even the emperor Nikephoros will stand in the slave-market among the prisoners of war.<sup>132</sup>

### The poem of Ibn Ḥazm<sup>133</sup>

This Byzantine poem soon reached al-Andalus and motivated the great Muslim thinker Ibn Ḥazm to reply. Although his poem presumably did not reach Byzantine lands and was less known by Muslim writers, it still reflects more important themes of the Christian-Muslim polemic.

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<sup>130</sup> - Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya*, 2, p. 179.

<sup>131</sup> - On the Bible and prophecy of Muḥammad, see the following chapter.

<sup>132</sup> - Ibid, verses 63-74.

<sup>133</sup> - Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya*, II, pp. 184-189; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-nihāya*, 11, 247-252.

The poem consists of 138 verses, 38 of them an apologia defending Islam and refuting the claims of the emperor. In these verses, Ibn Ḥazm deals with several points in the Byzantine-Muslim polemic. These are excerpts from the poem:

O defeated! How can you couple a triune religion, which is far from logic and (has) visible sins?

.....

Your gospels are fabricated, and their first ones' speeches tell lies about the great things which they brought.

And you still prostrate yourself before a wooden cross. Oh minds of grazing animals!!

Perverse ones, you believe in the crucifixion of your God by hands of sinful and vile Jews

In the religion of Islam, monotheism, there is no other religion which could challenge us.

...<sup>134</sup>

His God supported him by victory, and humiliated his enemies.

Poor and lonely, no tribe supported him nor pushed the slander of the vituperators.

He had not enough money for partisans nor for pacifying enemies or for an adherent.

....

He never suffered captivity nor his was body exposed to beatings

As every sinful one of you claims in lies and counterfeit concerning the face of Jesus.

Even so, you have said he is your God. What foolishness and delusion!!

God never had a son or a partner. The heralds of atheism will repent.

But he (Jesus) is a servant, a prophet and a creature honoured by people, not as some claim.

How could God's face could be slapped? How astray you have gone! Indeed you exceed in your ignorance every wrongful ones.

How many miracles Muḥammad performed, and how many banners he showed which annihilated atheism.

All people were equal in his support, for all were servants of his glory.

Arabs, Ethiopians, Turk, Berbers, and Persians; indeed only those who contributed to Islam prevailed.

Copts, Anbāṭ, Khazars, Daylms and Rum, they throw you by weapons to defend him.

They rejected the atheism of the (their) ancestors and hence became Ḥanfā'<sup>135</sup>.

Indeed they won a great share of happiness.

By him, they all embraced the right (religion), and obeyed the obligatory laws of God.

By him, the vision, which Daniel<sup>136</sup> brought before him, became true.

Like al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, Ibn Ḥazm devoted most of his poem to disparaging the Byzantine victories, considering them, from his point of view as a temporary ordeal. Furthermore, he, unlike al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, launched a severe attack against the Ḥamdaind emir Sayf al-Dawla, calling him and his family impure.

### **Ibn Hazm's other works**

From the other side of the Muslim world, Ibn Ḥazm began a new stage of the Muslim polemic against Christianity. The intellectual rich climate al-Andalus offered him a better chance than most Muslim thinkers have to study in detail the books of the Christians and the Jews. Furthermore, he was well aware of the discrepancies between the different Christian sects. Unlike most of his predecessors among Muslim theologians, he, using his superior knowledge, targeted the authenticity of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. He does not often quoted the Qur'ān as his final

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<sup>134</sup> - In some poorly written verses, Ibn Ḥazm listed some local Arabic tribes in Yemen and around Gulf who embraced Islam during the life of the prophet.

<sup>135</sup> - The Ḥunafā' are those pre-Islamic Arabs who, according to Islamic traditions, had followed the religion of Abraham and kept their monotheism in the pagan Arabia. Later the word was used to refer Muslims as well, and it appears in the Qur'ān several times.



word, but focuses on the contents and the internal contradictions of the Bible, through a careful and mostly accurate study of the four gospels.<sup>137</sup> Afterwards, he carefully selects some stories of the New Testament and launches a fierce attack against them, using rational analysis as well as sarcastic and offensive language against the writers of the gospels.<sup>138</sup> At the same time, he discusses the Trinity and the incarnation, using the traditional Muslim approach of rational arguments, without relaying heavily on the Qur'ānic text.<sup>139</sup>

As for Byzantium, Ibn Ḥazm was relatively far from the direct contact with it, but nevertheless he contributes substantially to the Muslim polemic against Byzantium. He follows the lead of other Muslim theologians, especially al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, in laying stress on the responsibility of the emperor Constantine the Great for spreading Christianity by the sword and violence.<sup>140</sup> Finally, he confronts some major objections of the Christian polemic, in which the Byzantine polemic can be traced clearly. Firstly he defends the Muslim notion of denying the crucifixion of Christ, though it was accepted by huge numbers of Jews and Christians.<sup>141</sup> Then he

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<sup>136</sup> -Daniel, 7.

<sup>137</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, pp. 6-15.

<sup>138</sup> -Among the stories he selects is the story of Jesus and Satan (Matthew 4 - Ibn Ḥazm erroneously gives it the number 3) in which, according to the Bible, Satan tempted Jesus for 40 days, and promised to give him the kingdoms of the whole world. Ibn Ḥazm wonders sarcastically how Satan was able to offer Almighty God, creator of all (i.e. Jesus, according to the Christian creed) the kingdoms of the earth. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, pp 16-17. A similar criticism of this story appears in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's work, yet in more courteous language, presumably as a gesture of respect to his Christian family. 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, pp. 132-133. c.f al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīl dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, p. 166.

Among other stories he compares the gospels and their different narratives about the attitude of the two thieves who were crucified beside Jesus. As Mathew (27: 43 as usual, Ibn Ḥazm gives it as 28) and Mark (15:32) narrate, they were mocking him, while Luke (23:43) says that one of them was praying before him. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, p. 50. Among other stories he deals with the identity of the person who was forced to carry the cross.

For a wider discussion on Ibn Ḥazm's Christology. see R. Arnaldez *Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue*, (Paris 1956) ; Idem, 'Controverse théologique chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue et Ghazali', *Mardis de Dar-es-Salam* (Paris - le Caire 1956) 207-248.

<sup>139</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, I, pp. 51-57.

<sup>140</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, p. 87. He says also that the emperor was an Arian and never believed in the Trinity.

<sup>141</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, wrote a scenario or reconstruction of the day of the crucifixion. He claims a conspiracy between some secret supporters of Jesus who managed to get him off the cross later, when the

discusses in detail the Christian accusations against Islam concerning the corporal life in paradise according to the Qur'ān.

In a word, Ibn Ḥazm pays particular consideration to the language and contents of the whole Bible. Unlike most of the early Muslim theologians who, to some extent, accept the authenticity of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and use it in their polemic, either to refute some Christian dogmas, or to confirm the foretelling of Muḥammad in the Bible, Ibn Ḥazm denies the authenticity of the Bible as a whole.<sup>142</sup> Though he also makes use of the Old Testament to support his debates, but it is merely a tactic, rather than the use of it in reference. At the same time, he repeatedly mocks the language and style of the Bible, which suggests his comprehensive reading of the entire Bible in Arabic.

To sum up, Islamic polemic against Byzantium was only a minor slice of the whole Muslim polemic against Christians and Jews and equally against other Muslim sects. It was a strong tradition and almost an obligation of every Muslim scholar to expose all the Muslim sects and explain and support his own while discussing and refuting the others.<sup>143</sup> In this long established practice, the polemic against Christian and Jews became an essential part.

It seems that the Muslim theologians were more acquainted with Arab Christian rather than with Byzantines writings. Accordingly, only a few Muslim theologians

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guards and attendants had left. Furthermore he hints that those who saw the actual crucifixion were a tiny number who cannot be trusted. This notion was Ibn Ḥazm's explanation of the Qur'ānic verse "they killed him not, nor crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them" (4: 157). Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, I, pp. 57-60.

<sup>142</sup> - See for example, 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī, who made an intensive use of the Old and New Testament. Ibn Ḥazm, vigorously blamed the Muslims who accepted the authenticity of the Bible. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, I, p. 215.

<sup>143</sup> - Among those Muslim thinkers are al-Jāḥiẓ; al-Ash'arī; Ibn Ḥazm; al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār; al-Māturīdī; al-Mas'ūdī.

pay attention to the peculiarity of Byzantine polemic, as the latter is directed in a different way and mostly to the non-Muslim reader.

## Chapter six

### General themes in Byzantine-Muslim polemic

Byzantine-Muslim polemic is relatively a small component of the whole Muslim-Christian polemic. Nevertheless, it has its own unique features, as well as its peculiar historical background. Although this polemic was a crucial part of Byzantine-Muslim relations, only political circumstances and will of the sovereigns concerned brought together the theologians from both sides to face each other. To some extent the correlation between the polemic and the politico-military affairs between Arabs and Byzantium appears hazy and obscure, but even so it is impossible to dismiss the role of religion in this context.

Since Byzantium stands at the forefront of the Christian world facing Islam, religion played a crucial role in its conflict against the Muslim world, though the religious disputes between Muslims and Christian thinkers emerged mainly within the Muslim realm. But the state's intervention in such polemic appeared early during the life of Muḥammad himself, when he set an example by the letter which he sent to the emperor Heraclius. Whatever the authenticity of this letter, it was certainly a pattern for some of the pious early caliphs to follow their prophet and invite their foreign counterparts to embrace Islam. Henceforth, relations between the authorities in both Byzantium and the caliphates, in the sphere of religion, ranged between the direct and personal involvement of the some caliphs or emperors and mere individual efforts on the part of some theologians on both sides. On the Muslim side, during the period covered by this thesis we have only a few hazy examples of Muslim rulers who tried to debate personally with their Byzantine counterparts. The Faṭimīd caliph al-Mu'izz alluded to his desire to take part in such diplomatic polemic, and to debate personally

with the emperor. However, as he said, the fact that he expected the Byzantines to refuse his invitation to embrace Islam crippled such an idea.<sup>1</sup>

### **State sponsorship of polemic**

In the Umayyads' caliphate, apart from the polemical letter which was attributed to 'Umar II, no surviving polemical text bears evidence of either direct or indirect intervention on the part of any caliph as well as any Byzantine emperor. This may be attributed to the fact that the polemic on both sides was of slow growth in the seventh and eighth centuries. Yet, while the Umayyads' caliphate suffered from several internal conflicts against Muslim rivals, the religious sects and their sharp disputes between all elements of the communities, Muslims, Christian and others, and even the waves of heresies, all failed to offer any substantial menace to the state, or the spiritual harmony of the community in general, which would have provoked the authorities to intervene. One may add that the personality of some Umayyad caliphs does not imply much interest in religious disputes or the propagation of Islam among their non-Muslim neighbours. The only known exception to this rule is 'Umar II, who reportedly sent a polemical letter to the emperor Leo III, who replied by a lengthy letter to confirm his faith and refute the objections of the caliph. Notwithstanding the disputes between modern scholars on the authenticity and dates of these two letters, it is almost certain that the caliph did send a letter to the emperor.<sup>2</sup>

In the 'Abbasid era, however, the whole situation changed completely in every aspect. The flourishing of the intellectual schools coincided with the spread of waves of heresies. Some caliphs became involved in the disputes between Muslim sects, and even promulgated some of their views as a part of formal policy of state.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the Muslim-Christian polemic reached its climax. Not only the intellectual elite

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<sup>1</sup> - S. M. Stern, 'An embassy of the Byzantine emperor', Arabic text, pp. 256, English trans. p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> - See supra chapter I, pp. 96-98.

theologians but also the laity took part in debates. No wonder that the caliphs began seriously to pay attention to these heresies, as well as to the growing daily debates between Muslims and Christians.

According to al-Mas'ūdi, the caliph al-Mahdī (158-169 H./ 775-785 A.D.) was the first caliph to entrust some Muslim philosophers with the response to the new challenge from the different heresies which appeared mainly from Persia; he instructed them to refute their teachings and their attacks against Islam.<sup>4</sup> Some years later, his son Hārūn al-Rashīd, sent a polemical letter to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VI, in which he did not defend Islam as much as try to refute Christian dogmas, and advise the emperor to avoid further destruction of his empire by accepting Islam or pay the al-Jizya.<sup>5</sup>

It was mainly during the reign of the caliph al-Mutawakkil that the 'Abbasid authorities felt the present deep threat of the heretical movements, as well as the massive increase of the public debates between different sects and religions in his realm. It is not surprising that the 'Abbasid era began to witness a series of decrees to tighten the freedom of the non-Muslim subjects.<sup>6</sup> Remarkably, this harsh attitude extended equally against the intellectual schools and their traditional debates on the problems of the creed. 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī introduced his polemical book saying:

"By the blessing of his Caliph, the imam Ja'far al-Mutawakkil 'ala-Allah, commander of the faithful - may God prolong his life - who guided me and made me profit by words heard from him. He is earnest and eager that such

<sup>3</sup> - E.g. al-Ma'mūn and the dispute over the creation of the Qur'ān.

<sup>4</sup> - Al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawhar*, IV, p. 289.

<sup>5</sup> - On this letter see supra, chapter 1, pp. 98-101.

<sup>6</sup> - The caliph al-Mutawakkil issued the severest decrees against non-Muslim subjects. He forced them to wear distinctive clothes, forbade their work in the official offices, and ordered them to hang some Satanic signs on their doors. In 295 H. his grandson, the caliph al-Muqtadir, issued a decree against his non-Muslims subjects forcing them to wear distinctive clothes. Ibn al-Muqaffa', (ed. Cairo) II, I, p. 4; Sa'īd b. al-Baṭrīq, *al-tarīkh* II, p. 62-63; al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-a'shā fi sinā'it al-inshā'*, 13, p. 369. The repercussion of these decrees appeared in the Byzantine sources, see Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts*, p. 55. cf. Bar Hebraeus, I, p. 141 (on the caliph al-Mu'taṣim and his anti-Christian policy).

books should be spread and perpetuated in order to strengthen the motives of credibility of the faith, to make its proofs triumph and to convince of his merit, therein those who ignore it and do not recognise, and for God has afflicted<sup>7</sup> Islam and its followers in his time" <sup>8</sup>

In this text, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, who wrote under the personal supervision of the caliph, indicates that one of the aims of the caliph's support of such polemical works is "because of what happened to Islam and Muslims in his reign",<sup>9</sup> and what was "renewed of the kramāt (dignity) of Islam in his time".<sup>10</sup> These two allusions referred to the personal feelings and policy of the caliph, who saw himself as a hero of Orthodox Islam. He was struggling to tighten his grasp on state affairs facing the new growing power of the Turkish elements. At the same time, he made substantial efforts to restore spiritual harmony to his troubled empire. Furthermore, he was personally interested in spreading Islam and support the Muslim creed, especially the Orthodox sect (ahl al-Sunnah) in the face of the others.

Likewise, another Islamic author indicates this situation clearly and gives more details about the general confusion among the public; while having discussions with Christian theologians "they succeeded in throwing dust in the eyes of staunch believers and in bewildering the minds of those who are weak in faith".<sup>11</sup> Both writers, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Jāhīz, show the affects of daily debates between Muslims and Christians.

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<sup>7</sup> - Arabic اِبْتَلَى *Ibtalā* means precisely, single out with harm or bad things or tempt, a word repeatedly used in the Qur'ān to signify a hard test usually imposed on humans by God. The translator erroneously chooses *single out* for translation.

<sup>8</sup> - 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, p. 8. English trans. A. Mingana; reprinted in, N.A Newman, *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, p. 571.

<sup>9</sup> - Idem

<sup>10</sup> - Idem.

<sup>11</sup> - Al-Jāhīz, *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 20. English trans, J. Finkel, reprinted in, N. Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, p. 707

One may wonder where the Byzantine polemic was. Did it really form any kind of threat to the Muslim creed or the Muslim public? Prima facie, the borders between Byzantium and the Muslims in matters of religion were not the same as the fiscal ones. The Christian Melkites, who were more or less Byzantines even if they spoke Arabic, were the actual founders of Byzantine polemic. As for the Muslim authorities, they always were suspicious against those Melkites, who presumably contributed to the debates with the Muslim public. As we have seen, there were some cases, but rare ones, of Byzantine support and patronage of some Arab-Christian writers who used their bilingual capacity against Islam in the propaganda war between the Muslims and Byzantium.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the Byzantine propaganda machine, including the polemic ipso facto, was employed to whitewash the depopulation and forced conversion of thousands of Muslims in northern Syria in the tenth century. These activities presumably were conducted within Muslim borders.<sup>13</sup>

Aimed directly against Byzantium, there was a form of state sponsorship of the Muslim polemic, which is the mission of al-Bāqillānī, who was chosen “to show the sublimity of Islam and repugnance towards Christianity”. Although the religious aspect of the mission of al-Bāqillānī is not precisely obvious, the peculiarity of the personality of al-Bāqillānī, who was a former judge on the Thughūr, and the great defender of Orthodox Islam against its rivals, certainly indicates the religious aim of the mission, or even may suggest the existence of diplomatic-polemic alongside the military and political relations between the two worlds. It is noteworthy that ‘Aḍaḍ al-Dawlah, the very same Muslim prince who sent al-Bāqillānī on his mission to Byzantium, entrusted him to teach his own son, and more important to write a wide-ranging book, in which al-Bāqillānī was commissioned to write “what is required to

<sup>12</sup> - Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, 4, p. 143. See supra Chapter 4, p. 226-227.

<sup>13</sup> - Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwah*, I, p. 183. See supra chapter 3, p. 179, note 122.



be known about science and its branches ... and evidence of creation of the world ... and finally comments on the other sects of non-Muslim, and on Christians and Jews".<sup>14</sup>

The coinciding of the polemic and politics appeared in Byzantine-Muslim relations. According to both Byzantine and Muslim sources the prominent Muslim vizier 'Alī b. 'Isā exchanged diplomatic missions with Byzantium,<sup>15</sup> and concurrently we are informed by some Muslim sources that he sponsored diplomatic polemic against Byzantium, for he entrusted a Muslim theologian called Aḥmad b. Yahyā b. al-Munajjim (d. 938AD./ 327H.) to refute a letter sent by the emperor which expressed *schadenfreude* at the Muslim disturbances caused at the hands of Qaramitans.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, it should be stated that presenting an image of any Muslim caliph or emir as a protector of Islam and benefactor of theologians (in their polemic) would certainly assist his reputation, as well as his personal and political prestige among his subjects, even beyond the political boundary of his authority. Such a reputation had already been used in the propaganda war between the Sunni 'Abbasid and the Shiite Fatimids.<sup>17</sup>

On the Byzantine side, the state sponsorship of the polemic against Muslims undoubtedly appeared more obvious. There were several emperors who investigated

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<sup>14</sup> - Al-Bāqillānī, *al-tamhīd* (ed. Beirut) pp. 2-5.

<sup>15</sup> - Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥādarah*, pp. 30-31, English trans pp. 32-33.; Nicholas I, *Letters*, pp. 373-38. See R. Jenkins, "The emperor Alexander and the Saracen prisoners"

<sup>16</sup> - 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīr dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, II, p. 343.

<sup>17</sup> - On several occasions, specially when they were preparing their conquest of Egypt, the Fatimids announced that the main aim for their movement was not to expand their state, but rather to take part in Jihad for the sake of God and to save the Muslims of the East whose leadership, i.e. the 'Abbasides, had become incompetent and paralysed. Al-Maqrīzī, *'Itti'āz*, I, pp. 104, 108, 115, 133; Ibn Hānī' al-Andalusī, the Fatimid poet used the Jihad against Rum in his poems in which he praised the Fatimides for their support of Jihad. Ibn Hānī', cited by N. 'Abd al-Rḥmān, *Shi'r al-sirā'*, pp. 346-347. However, the Fatimids' good treatment of Byzantine prisoners of war made some Sunni scholars accuse them of siding with the Byzantines against the Muslims. Al-Qāḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīr dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, II, pp. 342-343.

Islam and personally contributed to the debates against Muslims or at least commissioned most of the polemical works. According to Niketas of Byzantium, the emperor ought to promote the faith of his people as well as refute the book of Muḥammad.<sup>18</sup> Exactly like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, Niketas began his work by calling down a blessing on the emperor.<sup>19</sup> It is not clear what he may have been referring to, whether the direct patronage of a Byzantine sovereign for a polemical work against his Muslim enemies and their sacred book or whether this was a just merely a gesture added by Niketas in seeking the support of the emperor?

In the vita of Constantine, the apostle of the Slavs, we find a similar allusion to the patronage of the emperor. Reportedly, the emperor called to the young philosopher, saying: “Have you heard, philosopher, what foul Ishmaelites utter against our creed? You, being a servant and disciple of the Holy Trinity, must go forth and oppose them.”<sup>20</sup> Soon an embassy was dispatched to Baghdad to debate with the Muslims. Despite the fairy tale nature of the whole story, the emperor appeared as a patron of Christianity against the Muslims. Like other similar stories, it reflects some sort of historical reality, even if its strict authenticity may be doubted.

In a unique narrative, the Muslim tenth century theologian al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, says:

“The Rum pay very special attention to knowing the circumstances of their enemies. They are always cynical, and their vigilance is permanent. Even until now, when Islam is debilitated and its people have gone (sic), they send spies to Khurāsan and all over Muslim (lands), they (even) have some who go to Mecca every year to attend the season (of pilgrimage) and return to them with news”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> - Niketas, *Refut.* col. 673

<sup>19</sup> - Niketas, *Refut.* col. 673

<sup>20</sup> - Kliment Okhridski, *Life and acts of our blessed father*, p. 55.

If this narrative is to be trusted, and I have no reason to undermine its authenticity, it certainly opens a new window on Byzantine-Muslim polemic. It is quite possible to see Byzantium sending spies against their enemies, but why to Mecca? Unfortunately there is no satisfactory answer to such a question. However, one may suppose that such Byzantine spies to Mecca, if they ever existed, were Christian Arabs who were fluent in Arabic, so they would not be identified among the Muslim crowds.

At the same time, while the secular authorities in Byzantium were extremely interested in depopulating Muslim lands in northern Syria mainly in the tenth century, bringing the people inside the boundary of the empire, and soon after making attempts to convert them. We also have a few examples of specific attempts to use or rather encourage genuine Christian Arabs to write polemic against Islam. According to al-Jāhiz, a certain Christian Arab composed a book against Islam, under the patronage of the Byzantine emperor.<sup>22</sup> Most probably, another anonymous Arab Christian writer was entrusted by the emperor Nikephoros Phokas to write a lengthy polemical poem, which was sent to the Muslims. Though we know almost nothing about these Christian Arab writers, both cases alluded clearly to a policy of state sponsorship of anti-Muslim polemicists, which was expanded even beyond the boundary of the empire.

The poem of emperor Nikephoros Phokas reflects his personal ambitions and attitude towards Islam and Muslims. On the face of it, it is unlikely that he knew the Arabic language apart from his alleged Arab origin.<sup>23</sup> Whoever wrote this poem, it is

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<sup>21</sup> - Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwah*, II, p. 335.

<sup>22</sup> - Al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 4, p. 143.

<sup>23</sup> - In verse 29 the poet alludes to the Arab origin of the emperor, and to his family origin in the city of Damascus. Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya*, II, p. 180. Some other Muslim sources speak of an Arab origin of Nikephoros, see Ibn al-Athīr, *al-kāmil*, 5, p. 38; Ibn Kathīr says the father of the emperor was a Muslim man from the city of Ṭarsūs. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-nihāya*, 11, p.

almost certain that he worked under the direct patronage of the emperor and certainly the whole poem is a translation of his ideas or may be a translation of a missing Greek text written (or approved) by the emperor. Another Byzantine emperor, Leo VI, wrote some comments on the Muslims and the implications of the religion and religious zeal in the war against Byzantium.<sup>24</sup> These remarks reflect his personal awareness of the main foe of his empire. His son, Constantine VII paid special attention to Islam and the Muslim creed, although his contribution to the Byzantine polemic against Islam merely copies some passages from others, mainly Theophanes the Confessor.

Another Byzantine text was reportedly written as part of state diplomacy; this is the letter of Arethas of Caesarea. P. Karlin-Hayter argues convincingly that the letter was written under the command of the emperor Romanos I Lekapenos, while D. Sahas corrected the title of the letter, and showed the originally missing Muslim letter that the letter was addressed to the emperor Romanos, rather than to "Roman" as Popov read it, yet D. Sahas later dated the same letter to 905.<sup>25</sup> Indeed we have an allusion in the Arab sources to the very same letter.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, setting aside the dispute between the modern scholars on the attribution of the letter to Arethas, one may hypothesize that the current text of the letter is a local copy of a missing formal letter sent to the Muslims. For the harsh language and the hazy references to Muslims as "you" and "they" as Sahas pointed out,<sup>27</sup> dismiss the possibility of considering it as

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268. However, Von G. Grünebaum, 'Eine poetische Polemik' p. 49. Grünebaum (p. 57) does not seem to be convinced that this poem as an evidence of possible Arab origins of the emperor. It is of interest, that Liduprand of Cremona described Niketphoros as "in colour an Ethiopian" which may misled some Arabs in their thinking of an Arabic origin of the emperor. Liudprand of Cremona, *The works*, p. 236. On the origin of Phokas's family, see *ODB.*, s.v., 'Phokas', However, the poet may refer to the Roman emperors who were Nikephoros' predecessors in ruling over Damascus, rather than his direct family.

<sup>24</sup> - Leo VI, *Taktika*, XVIII, cols. 972 b-d. 976 c-d

<sup>25</sup> -P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas' letter to the emir at Damascus', pp. 284-285.

<sup>26</sup> - 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, II, p. 343.

<sup>27</sup> - D. Sahas, 'Arethas' 'Letter to the emir at Damascus', p. 77.

a formal document and the actual copy sent to the Muslims. Most likely it was a modified copy customised for a Christian reader.

Sometime before Arethas, we have another example of alleged Byzantine official replies which were sent to the Muslims by the command of the emperors. Niketas of Byzantium states clearly that his letters are "Refutations of the letter sent to the emperor Michael".<sup>28</sup> If such narrative is to be trusted,<sup>29</sup> it may be safely presumed, that Niketas wrote both his replies at the emperor's request.

In the Christian communities under the Muslims' rule, it seems that the churches and monasteries played a decisive, yet a very cautious role, in sponsoring the polemical writings. Although they were only indirectly involved, presumably fearing Muslim authorities, nevertheless, we do know several examples of apologetic manuscripts which were kept, copied and translated within monasteries or with the individual support of some clerics.<sup>30</sup> In Byzantium itself the church adopted the very vehement text of the ritual of abjurations of Muslims who would like to convert to Christianity and kept it in the "book on Catechism". Remarkably, the clerics resisted the attempts of the emperor Manuel I to "have the anathematisation expunged from all the catechetical books beginning with the codex of the Great Church".<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> - Niketas, *Refut.* cols. 807-808, 821-822; see J. Demetriades, *Nicetas*, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> - J. Demetriades wrote a careful comparison on the terminology of the *anatrope* and the two letters of Niketas and he hypothesized that the two letters, allegedly sent to Muslims as replies to early letters, were not written by Niketas and may not even be actual letters sent to Muslims. However, apart from the language differences there is no concrete evidence either to attribute the letters to Niketas or to deny their authenticity. See J. Demetriades, *Nicetas*, pp. 103-120.

<sup>30</sup> - The monastery of St. Saba near Jerusalem was the main sources of manuscripts. In this monastery and in others, especially St. Catharine's in Mount Sinai, most of the polemical Arabic treatises were kept. As regards, the anonymous texts known as *Summa Theologiae Arabica*, were copied at the request of a certain bishop (Basil). See S. Griffith, 'Islam and the summa theologiae arabica; Rabi'I 264 A.H.', *JSAI* 13 (1990). P. 230.

<sup>31</sup> - Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker, (Bonn 1835) p. 278, English trans. H. J. Magoulias, *O city of Byzantium*, p. 121.

## Forms of polemic

The Byzantine-Muslim polemic was intermixed among the political and military relations on both sides. Simply, it was a theological encounter lying within a wider and yet different pair of contexts, Byzantine-Muslim relations in all their aspects and Christian-Muslim polemic in general.

In Byzantium, relatively few works between eighth and eleventh centuries were devoted entirely to arguments against Islam. The best-known examples are the works of Niketas of Byzantium. Obviously most of the polemic came within other works, chronicles, comments, *vitas*, hymns, songs and sermons. It was a common practice for the Byzantine historians to speak generally about Islam and add some mostly aggressive comments about Muḥammad, and the origin of the Byzantine-Muslim wars. At the same time, we have a few examples of direct polemical letters exchanged between Byzantium and Muslims. Remarkably, Muslims mostly took out the initiative in this polemical diplomacy, at least compared with normal diplomacy, which usually started from the Byzantine side. Presumably the Muslims' incentive was their desire to follow the example of the prophet, at least theoretically, while in some other cases it appears to have figured as personal propaganda for certain Muslim sovereigns.<sup>32</sup>

On the Muslim side, polemical texts varied in their nature, aims, target reader, style, language, and the reception they enjoyed (or suffered) among other Muslims. As the Muslim polemic coincided with the growth of Muslim *kalam*, gradually it became an essential part of the Muslims' intellectual life. Accordingly, one of the first

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<sup>32</sup> -To a certain extent, one can count the letter of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd to the emperor Constantine VI in this category. Similarly, Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn (governor of Egypt) replied to what seems to be a normal diplomatic letter of the emperors Leo VI and Alexander with a polemical one. On a smaller scale, Skylitzes narrates that the Muslim emir of Melitene wrote a sarcastic letter to the Byzantine general Anderas, wondering whether Jesus son of Mary would help the Christians

forms of the polemic was the dialogue, which was a direct reflection of the daily debates between the thinkers from both sides, or even the laity who tried to contribute and cast their own words into these wide, complex issues.<sup>33</sup> It is no surprise that, several Muslims thinkers speak of their personal encounter with other Christian thinkers about religious issue.<sup>34</sup> For the outstanding feature of the Muslim *mutkalmān* was to expose the doctrine of their sects and others, as well as debating against other schools. However, polemic against Christianity soon became a crucial part of any kalam work, and most of these works dedicated a chapter or a short section to discussing the Christian creed,<sup>35</sup> while there was a growing tendency to devote individual treatises to deal with Christian objections against Islam.<sup>36</sup>

### **Aims of polemic:**

#### **A- Substantiation of faith and protecting the simple-minded laity**

The common notion that any polemical work has been written in the context of some kind of religious dispute between two rivals is certainly a paradox from the Byzantine-Muslim perspective. The Byzantine-Muslim polemical writings are of two distinct groups. The first one contains some actual or alleged dialogues or letters exchanged between two antagonists, who have their own individual character, and those mostly form a somewhat small portion of the whole polemic. The main group consists of several writings mostly addressed to a co-religionist; each has a different reader and implies different circumstances.

On both the Byzantine and the Muslim sides, the aims of the polemical and apologetic texts were almost similar. One of the first and essential aims of the whole

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against his assault. Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Tarīkh*, II, 2, p. 75; John Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 143-144, German Trans. p. 180.

<sup>33</sup> -Al-Jāhīz, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p 20. English trans. J. Fenkel, reprinted in N.A Newman, *The early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, p. 707.

<sup>34</sup> - Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-fihrist*, p. 33; al-Mas'ūdi, *al-tanbīh wa al-'Ishrāf*, p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> - E.g. al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār; al-Bāqillānī; Ibn Ḥazm and al-Māturīdī.

polemic was to protect the simple-minded laity. This aim appears in different types of treatises, either to confirm the faith, or to refute the accusations of the other side, or even to answer the questions which might be raised by the adversaries in order to refute them.<sup>37</sup> The Qur'ān, the first Islamic polemical text deals with this problem. In many verses it addresses the Muslims and explains to them in logical and simple way the unity and oneness of God, and how mistaken are the Christians in their belief in the Trinity. Then it addresses the Christians and challenges their creed, besides refuting any possible objection they might make.

One of the first crucial steps in the Islamic polemic was to reinforce the previous works, and tackle the missing points or correct others in the early works. 'Alī al-Ṭabari says, criticising the previous works:

" Some of them have shortened, curtailed and contradicted their argument and have not explained it satisfactorily; some of them have argued in poetry against the people of the book and in ignorance of their books; and some of them have crammed the two faces of their books with addresses to Muslims rather than to polytheists and then have put forth their proofs in a most elaborate and difficult discourse"<sup>38</sup>

Then he, a former Christian offers his conception of an ideal, effective polemical work, which will explain the best and most understandable way to address the Christians.

In the Muslim lands, especially in the ninth and tenth centuries, the Muslim cultural milieu assimilated different intellectual currents from newly converted non-

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<sup>36</sup> -E.g. 'Alī al-Ṭabari; al-Jāhiz (he made some references to Christianity within his other works as well) and Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq.

<sup>37</sup> - On the Byzantine side the clearest example is the dialogue attributed to John of Damascus. On the Muslim side, the Qur'ān instituted the first example of teaching the art of dialogue with non-Muslims. Qur'ān, 2: 93-95; 3: 20, 61-66;



Arab Muslims as well as the legacy of the Ancient Greek thinkers.<sup>39</sup> In sum, the vivid Muslim cultural milieu produced several intellectual schools, as well as waves of different heresies. At the same time, daily life in such an active renaissance generated numerous debates either between scholars from different schools, or between the Muslim and non-Muslim laity. Interestingly, the Muslim thinkers felt annoyed by the involvement of the laity in such debates, as they realised that an increasing number of Muslims were becoming bewildered in their debates with non-Muslims. Al-Jahiz, says, "How unfortunate that every Muslim looks upon himself as a theologian and thinks that everyone is fit to lead a discussion with an atheist". Consequently those Christians "succeeded in throwing dust in the eyes of the staunch believers and in bewildering the minds of those who are weak in faith".<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the intensive efforts by Muslim theologians to warn and protect their laity, some centuries later, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya noticed the failure of common Muslims in the sophisticated dialogues with Christians, even the title of his book (the guide to the perplexed in answering the Christians and Jews) indicates the special concern of Muslim scholars to support the laity against hostile propaganda.

However, the waves of heresies and intensive public debates irritated the authorities as well. The caliph al-Mutawakkil was personally annoyed, and saw Islam in danger. Consequently, he ordered the suppression of all kind of public debates. At the same time, he sponsored a series of apologetic Muslim works.<sup>41</sup>

Another aim of the polemical writings in Islam was to respond to challenges and objections from the other side, i.e. the Christians, in the form of official letters

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<sup>38</sup> - 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, p. 7; English translation A. Mingana, reprinted N. A. Newman (ed.), *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, p. 457

<sup>39</sup> - On the translations from Greek into Arabic, see the intensive discussions of: D. Gutass, *Greek thought, Arabic culture: the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad and early 'Abbāsīd society*.

sent from foreign rulers or clergy, or even from Christian thinkers within the boundaries of the caliphate.<sup>42</sup> One may assume that the main theological challenge from the Christian thinkers was essentially within the Arab lands, rather than the Byzantine theologians, who mostly addressed a Christian-Byzantine reader.

On the Byzantine side, the earliest polemical works such as those of John of Damascus and his disciple Theodore Abū Qurrah, seem to have been written specifically for a Christian reader. Prima facie, these alleged dialogues with some Muslims were written or modified later to show the Muslim interlocutor as a stupid one. That, in my opinion, may be a deliberate gambit to give confidence to the Christian reader and confirm his faith as well. More important, these dialogues are certainly intended as guides to normal Christians in their daily life in a Muslim dominated society.<sup>43</sup> In the dialogue attributed to John of Damascus, we have expressions such as: “if you are asked by a Sarac; and if the Sarac tell you; tell him that; reply to him”.<sup>44</sup> This is clearly a didactic dialogue written for teachings and as a guide for the Christian laity to help them in their daily debates with their Muslim neighbours. Most of the other works which were written later in Byzantium, seem in comparison to lack this character of direct didacticism. Interestingly enough, the

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<sup>40</sup> - Al-Jāhiz, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 20. English trans. J. Finkel reprinted in, N. Newman, (ed.) *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue*, p. 707.

<sup>41</sup> - This includes the works of Al-Jāhiz, and 'Alī al-Ṭabarī.

<sup>42</sup> - There was some polemical correspondence between Muslim and Christian Arab thinkers, most of which had been lost, while some seems to be fictitious or at least interpolated later; however, we have some texts as well as allusions in the Arab sources concerning such missing letters. The first known example of these dialogues is the alleged letters of al-Hāshimī and his Christian friend Kindī. More authentic letters were exchanged between Ibn al-Munjim and two of Christian thinkers of his time. K. Samir, *Une Correspondance islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munaḡḡim, Hunain b. Isahq and Qusta ibn Luqa*; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (The index) p. 295; The letter attributed to Paul of Antioch, a Melkite theologian, sent to one of his Muslim friends, attracted several Muslim theologians to reply to and refute it. The main reply was the major work of Ibn Tayymiah (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*). See M. H Siddiqi, 'Muslim and Byzantine Christian relations: letter of Paul of Antioch and Ibn Taymyah's response', p. 36 et seq.

<sup>43</sup> - One may add also the anonymous work known as *Summa Theologiae Arabica*, which was intended as Griffith pointed out, to be “ a practical manual to instruct the faith” S. Griffith, 'Islam and the summa theologiae arabica', p. 233.

emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote a book *De administrando imperio*, which was a 'manual of practical instructions for dealing with Empire's neighbours'.<sup>45</sup> In it, his short passage on Islam may be written to offer the chance for officials of the court and heirs to the throne to be enlightened on the creed of their fiercest enemy, the Muslims.

## **B- Polemic and missions**

It is noteworthy that the first known Muslim polemic was directed against Christians in general, without regard to their different sects. This was the Qur'ān, the Muslim sacred book, which undertook the task of inviting the Christians and Jews to embrace the new religion, at the same time refuting their claims.

One can assume that this attitude from the Qur'ān was the first and main motive to encourage Muslims to propagate Islam among their Christian neighbours and subjects. At the same time, this Qur'ānic polemic was the strongest reason for Christian thinkers of all times to want to reply against it. However, following the lead of the Qur'ān, most of the Muslim rulers tried to fulfil its message and invite their Christian neighbours and subjects to embrace Islam, but in reality, most of them were busy either with their internal problems or hindered by their personal non-religious character. Unfortunately, neither Arab nor Byzantine sources gives any indications of such an attempt by any of the late caliphs, who were mostly mere figures and shadows of their great predecessors. We have only three examples of such letters. First the disputable correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III,<sup>46</sup> the second letter of which is a lengthy treatise, sent from the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd to the emperor Constantine

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<sup>44</sup> - John of Damascus, *Disputatio saraceni et christiani*, cols. 1336-1348; English translation, D. Sahas, *John of Damascus, appendix II*, pp. 142-155.

<sup>45</sup> - A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, p. 582.

<sup>46</sup> - See chapter I, pp. 96-98.

VI.<sup>47</sup> The third letter was reportedly sent by Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn the governor of Egypt to the emperor Leo VI and his brother Alexander, in which he reportedly inquired about the Trinity and the divine filiation of Jesus.<sup>48</sup>

On the Byzantine side, the idea of missions in Muslim lands seemed to be a remote possibility, as there are no recorded attempts to initiate or sponsor such activity. Yet there are some incidents in which Byzantium called some Arab tribes to migrate to Byzantine lands, and later convert to Christianity.<sup>49</sup> But the nature of the conversion of this particular tribe (Banū Ḥabīb) was mostly political, and the main motive for it, according to Muslim sources, was the maltreatment they had received from the Muslim authorities. Unfortunately, our sources on both sides are absolutely silent on any previous Byzantine missionary activity among these tribes while they were still living in Muslim lands. However, the narrative of the Muslim theologian, al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, who dismissed and refuted the circulated Byzantine propaganda on the conversion of the displaced Muslims which occurred as miracles of the Byzantine patriarch, is extremely important in this context.<sup>50</sup> It indicates some kind of Byzantine propaganda activity among Muslims in the newly conquered lands, and presumably beyond the physical boundaries as well.

In sum, we have no letters or missions sent to Muslims to invite them to embrace Christianity. On the contrary, once unfortunate Muslims fell under the Byzantine yoke, they were mostly exposed to relentless efforts as well as generous bribes from the authorities to convert to Christianity. The most vulnerable group was of course the Muslim prisoners of war, especially those who were captured during their childhood.

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<sup>47</sup> - See chapter I, pp. 98-101.

<sup>48</sup> - Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II, 2, p. 75.

<sup>49</sup> - Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb surat al-'arḍ*, p. 211-213.

<sup>50</sup> - Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p.183.

### C. Polemic and the politico-military challenge

Within the lengthy course of the struggle between the Byzantium and Muslim world, there was a sort of polemic, which can be called politico-religious challenge. The unique example of such polemic is a poem written under the patronage the emperor Nikephoros Phokas, which was sent to the Muslim caliph. Likewise, the letter of Arethas of Caesarea reflects a challenge at another level. First of all it was a schadenfreude letter, in which the Byzantine writer expressed his joy at the news of the Muslims' turmoil. Furthermore, the theological arguments were full of boasting about recent Byzantine victories.

On the Muslim side, we have a very few examples of such politico-polemic. Among them one may count the letter of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashid to the emperor Constantine VI. Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn sent a similar politico-polemical letter to the emperor Leo VI and his brother Alexander.<sup>51</sup> On a local scale, the Byzantine historian John Skylitzes narrates that the Muslim emir of Melitene wrote a sarcastic letter to the Byzantine general Anderas, wondering whether Jesus son of Mary, would help the Christians against his attack. Stunned by such a letter, the Byzantine commander prayed to the icon of Mary to help the Christians against this blasphemy.<sup>52</sup>

These works were characterised by the direct linking of the political and military struggle with the Muslim-Christian polemic. Accordingly their motive was not totally religious. They were issued principally as a personal challenge, mostly between secular authorities; their purpose and circumstances were directly connected to the actual relations between the two sides. No wonder that their theological contents was poor overall and not to be compared with the writings of the professional theologians.

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<sup>51</sup> - Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II, 2, p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> - John Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 143-144, German trans. p. 180.

At the same time, the outcome of the military struggle is used often in the polemic. The victory was often portrayed as a sign of God's support for the right religion,<sup>53</sup> while the defeats were seen as a punishment for sins of these true believers, especially from Christian apologists.<sup>54</sup>

#### D- Deforming the other

Among the essential aims of the Byzantine-Muslim polemic was black propaganda, which required obviously exposing the vices and shortcomings of the other side, simultaneously hiding or disparaging their virtues. In most cases, this meant inventing stories and attributing them deliberately to the foe. This last practice was well known and very common in Byzantium; in fact it made it even harder to distinguish between the actual misunderstandings of the Muslim creed and the deliberate altering of the facts. The clearest example of this is the work of the monk Bartholomew of Edessa. In his short treatise against Islam, he shows a precise knowledge of some very minor Muslim rites, even ones that may not be realised by some Muslims.<sup>55</sup> At the same time he narrated (or invented) several strange stories about Muḥammad's family and his tomb in Mecca (sic).<sup>56</sup> There are several examples, among them some points raised by Nicetas of Byzantium. For example, he says that the Muslims are allowed to eat all kinds of animals.<sup>57</sup> Remarkably, most of the Byzantine sources devoted considerable attention to the

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<sup>53</sup> - For example, Ibn Abī al-Laiṭh, *Lettre du Calife Hārūn Al-Rasīd*, p. 130, 135 (the Arabic text) pp. 56, 62 (French trans.); 'Alī al-Ṭabrī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, pp. 50-54. On the Byzantine side, Niketas of Byzantium, *Refut.*, col. 672; Arethas, *Scripta Minora*, I, p. 243., French trans. A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas', p. 368.

<sup>54</sup> - Sophronios, *Oratio*, col. 3206; Anastasios Sinaites, *PG* 89, 1156 c; Vita Euthymii, p. 107; see W. Kaegi, 'Initial Byzantine reactions to the Arab conquest', pp. 139-140; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, pp. 67-73

<sup>55</sup> - He explained the custom of ablution in Islam, and pointed in detail the virtual ablution Muslims have to do using sand when there is no water (tayyimum). Bartholomew of Edessa, *Elenchus et Confutatio Agareni*, col. 1408. See A. Houry, *Les théologiens byzantins*, p. 284.

<sup>56</sup> - Bartholomew of Edessa, *Elenchus et confutatio Agareni*, col. 1412.

<sup>57</sup> - Niketas, *Refut.* cols. 720-721. Partial English trans. J. Demetriades, *Niketas of Byzantium*, p. 36; c.f. A. Houry, *Les théologiens byzantins*, p. 144.

Muslims' sexual life, and often portrayed them as slaves of their lust.<sup>58</sup> Yet it could be argued that while such an attitude may reflect Byzantine misunderstanding of polygamy the massive frequency of tales about Muslim sexual life did reflect a clear desire to deform the Muslims' moral reputation.

On the Muslim side, such practices were well known as well. Most of the Muslim authors have absolutely denied all virtues to Christian monks and clerics and even tried to discount any possible appreciation of monastic life by the Muslim laity. Some writers accused Byzantine nuns of committing fornication with soldiers and other monks for the sake of God (sic),<sup>59</sup> while some late Muslim thinkers interpreted women's confessions to priests as sexual intercourse to help the woman attain salvation.<sup>60</sup>

### Polemic and its readers

One of the differences between Muslim and Byzantine polemic was the target reader. Generally speaking, both of them showed most interest in saving and guiding their own fellows, Christian or Muslim. Byzantine polemic generally, except in a very few cases, did not have in mind any Muslim reader; even in cases in which the polemicist addressed a supposed Muslim reader, it was only a virtual foe.

In Byzantium, one may wonder about whether such a reader, was a member of the elite classes of the capital? A normal member of the mob of Constantinople? Someone from the provinces? Or just a monk in a monastery? To answer such questions, one has to examine the *mise en scène* of each work individually, before trying to build a general coherent theory. It is well known, as we have seen, that the

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<sup>58</sup> - Almost every Byzantine polemical work alluded somehow to Muslim sexual life.

<sup>59</sup> -Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 170-171; al-Jāhīz, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 20; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, I, pp. 74-75; on the Muslim respect for the Christian monks and their ascetic life, see Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb 'Uyūn al-Akhbār*, II, p. 368; see 'A. al-Sharīf, *al-Fikr al-islāmī fī al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, pp. 440-444.

<sup>60</sup> - Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, p. 265.

early polemical works were written as guidebooks for the spiritual support of the Christian communities in Muslims lands. In Byzantium, far from the Muslim danger, there was certainly less need for such guides.

Prima facie, most of the Byzantine polemic was written mainly for a Christian reader, whose knowledge of Islam was limited and far from comprehensive. The vehement language, the hostility in the works of Niketas of Byzantium, for example, make it impossible to maintain the hypothesis of A. Khoury that Niketas tried to argue with an imaginary Muslim reader.<sup>61</sup> However, as for the Byzantine reader, C. Mango elucidated the availability of books in Byzantium: "In Byzantine Empire between 750 and 850 A.D. books were very scarce and, by ordinary standards, fantastically expensive; ... there did not exist at the time a central library, except the one at the Patriarchate"<sup>62</sup> This theory, if it indeed is accepted, casts doubt on the effectiveness and availability of polemical works for the ordinary reader. Even if the availability of books has somehow had improved by the revival of learning in the ninth-tenth centuries, it is unlikely to have been such a dramatic change to have copied and distributed these polemical works on any considerable scale. Furthermore, both the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and Anna Comnena seem not to have read most of the polemical works, in particular Niketas of Byzantium. This striking fact either strains the authenticity of Niketas' work, or dates it to a late period, or equally it can seriously doubt its availability even in the imperial court.

Yet, there are several Byzantine letters, reportedly sent to a certain Muslim emir or caliph. Obviously, the *mise en scène* of each of them offers more problems rather than solutions, and suggests different assumptions. Apart from the lack of coherence and the problems of authenticity held out by most of them, the violent

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<sup>61</sup> - A. Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins*, p. 115.

<sup>62</sup> - C. Mango, 'The availability of books in the Byzantine empire' p. 43.



language and aggressive tone of some, such as Arethas' letter, entail a theory that they were not actually sent to Muslims or at best they were copies or drafts of actual diplomatic and respectful letters.<sup>63</sup>

From their different approach and milieu, the Melkites had an extremely different task. The spiritual leaders of the Melkite minority in the Muslim realm had two different types of religious opponent, first the other non-Chalcedonian Christians who could not forgive the role played in the past by the imperial armies in supporting Melkites; second, the Muslim dominant majority.

After a careful examination of the Melkite polemical writings between the seventh and twelfth centuries, one realises some striking facts. Prima facie, all of them carefully avoided any direct polemic against Islam. There are some alleged anti-Muslim polemical works, but these are missing,<sup>64</sup> presumably never having been written or, more likely they were some secret pamphlets, circulated among the members of the sect. Another striking fact is that they directed many of their arguments against Jews as virtual enemies, for they devoted a large part of their efforts to answer the (supposed) Jewish objections, which are more or less similar to those of Muslims. Presumably, they had the Muslim objections in mind while tackling the Jews as harmless rivals. One may, however, feel confident that some of these texts were genuine anti-Jewish polemic, while others were apologetics against both Jewish and Muslim objections.<sup>65</sup>

On the Muslim side, the majority of works were aimed at a Muslim reader, but a relatively considerable number addressed or at least tried to address the Christians.

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<sup>63</sup> - For example, compare the style and language of the actual letter sent by the patriarch Nicholas I and that of Arethas.

<sup>64</sup> -Such as the alleged works attributed to Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭākī, see R. Caspar et al., 'Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien', p. 202; G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 2, p. 51; J. H. Forsyth, *The Byzantine-Arab chronicle*, I, p. 21.

<sup>65</sup> - E.g. Sa'īd b. Bātrīq (Eutychius) *kitāb al-Burhān*.

‘Alī b. al-Ṭabarī frequently addressed his Christian family and friends, softened his language, and showed a considerable respect to their Bible. Similarly several Muslim theologians debated with their Christian friends.<sup>66</sup> However, beyond the political boundary of the Muslim realm, only by the will of a few Muslim rulers efforts were made to address the Byzantine emperors. But, to my knowledge, there is no attempt to address the Byzantine laity on the part of Muslim theologians, as the language barrier and the long history of hostility made it seem an impossible undertaking.

### **The problem of the authenticity of polemical works**

Broadly speaking, polemical works are often harder and elusive to examine. The religious zeal of the authors and later copier often affected their work and their credibility. In all the dialogues we have, which are often represented by one of the speakers only, we find the author, repeatedly starting the dialogue to make one side win, ending with the demolition of his opponent. Unfortunately, in the absence of opposite narrative, it is almost impossible to reconstruct the full text of the actual dialogue.<sup>67</sup>

One may say that almost all the Byzantine polemical texts fall into one of three different groups:

**A-** Authentic works of well-known authors.<sup>68</sup>

**B-** Doubtful works, attributed to genuine well-known authors<sup>69</sup>

**C-** Ambiguous works of unknown authors.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> - For example the correspondence between Ibn al-Munjim, and his Christian friends Ḥunain b. Ishāq and Quṣṭa ibn Luqā.

<sup>67</sup> - In the Byzantine-Muslim polemic there are several dialogues which reportedly take place between some scholars and officials from both sides. E.g. the dialogue of ‘Umar b. al-‘As (or ‘Umar Ibn Sa’d ?) and the Jacobite patriarch John I; also the dialogues of John of Damascus, Theodore Abū Qurrah and al-Bāqillānī.

<sup>68</sup> - E.g. Theophanes, emperors Leo VI and his son Constantine VII; George Hamartolos; Anna Comnena and Euthymius Zygabenus

<sup>69</sup> -E.g. John of Damascus, Theodore Abu-Qurrah (although our knowledge of his life is hazy) and Arethas of Caesarea.

Unfortunately, the third group includes the most important polemical texts in Byzantium, that is, the lengthy treatise of Niketas of Byzantium, about whom almost nothing is known, and all we have are some theories by modern scholars without concrete evidence for the authenticity of the text. The text itself has no chronological allusions, and the only reference it gives is to the emperor Michael III, as a pious and victorious emperor; even so it is implausible to accept that such a panegyric and claim of greatness could be given to the drunken emperor Michael III. More important, Niketas' treatise, despite its extreme importance as the main Byzantine work against Islam, seems to be almost unknown to succeeding Byzantine theologians, as none of them cites him, nor mentions his name. The same problem of ambiguity characterised other authors and their works, such as Bartholomew of Edessa and Evode.

On the Muslim side, the problem is certainly different. Relatively, there are not many works of unknown authors, yet we have some examples of anonymous authors,<sup>71</sup> but on a very small scale compared with those from Byzantium. The first and main problem in the context of authenticity is the Muslims' long established tradition of copying each other's works, not to say plagiarising. This widely known practice puts the modern researcher in a dilemma, and makes it impossible sometimes to identify the real writer. Although this could be tolerated in the case of historical narratives, where the facts can be examined and reassembled from other sources, in polemic, when it occurs it is almost impossible to figure out who specific authors actually were. Furthermore, plagiarism in polemical writings complicates the task of deciding whether the authors were aware of the Bible as they seem to be, or whether they just used oral tradition or again copied from here or there. The same criteria

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<sup>70</sup> - E.g. Evode; Niketas of Byzantium; al-Kindī wa al-Hāshimī and the anonymous vita of Saint Theodore of Edessa.

could be applied to their knowledge of and attitude towards Byzantium; while some visited Constantinople, others appear never to have approached the borders of the empire. Still, the plagiarism of the Muslim sources had its own unique advantage as well; it preserved large portions of some missing work,<sup>72</sup> or referred to the existence of some missing works of some authors, which prompts and helps modern scholars in their work on anonymous manuscripts.<sup>73</sup>

Among the most controversial texts in the Christian-Muslim polemic, there is a short treatise attributed to the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz,<sup>74</sup> though it has had comparatively little attention from modern scholars. The text explains (from a very Christian point of view) why God came to his creatures in a human form as his mercy, and declares that human beings will never be able to see the glory of God. Then the text uses a traditional Christian image (the sun and its light, and heat) to explain the Trinity. The final part of the treatise seems absolutely impossible to attribute to any Muslim caliph. It says, "Christ is one of one, descended from the heaven and ascended to it. He is the God of the whole world, glory to him, sanctify his names<sup>75</sup> from eternity, now and until the end of the world"<sup>76</sup>. The text eventually seems to convert the Muslim caliph to a Christian theologian, an echo to a similar story of the alleged conversion of the caliph al-Ma'mūn.<sup>77</sup> This unique text presumably was produced and circulated among the Christians in Egypt, and never reached Muslim

<sup>71</sup> -The letter attributed to the caliph 'Umar II. The anonymous text was published by D. Sourdel, and thought to be the missing text of the caliph, while some tend to consider it the missing treatise of al-Jāhiz.

<sup>72</sup> - The best example is the Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat rasūl Allah* which is used almost verbatim in the work of Ibn Hishām, and later restored and published. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allah*, English translation A. Guillaume. The introduction of the translator, pp. XXX-XXXI.

<sup>73</sup> -E.g. al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār alludes to missing book of al-Jāhiz. al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīṭ dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 148, 198.

<sup>74</sup> -G. Troupeau, 'Un traité christologique attribue au califé Fatimide al-Mu'izz' No. XVI, Idem, *Études sur le christianisme arabe au Moyen age*, Variorum (London 1995) Arabic text pp. 15-20, French trans. pp. 21-24.

<sup>75</sup> - This expression "names of God" is certainly of an Islamic origin.

<sup>76</sup> - "فالمسيح هو واحد من واحد، نزل من السماء وصعد إليها، وهو رب العالمين سبحانه وتقدس اسماءه من الأول والأب والآن والى" - G. Troupeau, 'Un traité christologique attribué au calife Fatimide al-Mu'izz', p. 20.

hands, otherwise it would have found its way to the anxious propaganda machine of the 'Abbasids, the vehement foes of the Fatimid.<sup>78</sup> In a word, this text is certainly fictitious, yet it offers another lucid example of the nature of the way in which polemical texts were handled and used in Muslim-Christian context.

### **Handling the polemical texts (rewritings- interpolations)**

One of the major features of the Byzantine (and Melkite) polemical texts is the obvious influence of the place in which they were written on the tone and style of the text. While those which were composed in Byzantine lands, such the works of Niketas of Byzantium or George Hamartolos were characterised by pointed and aggressive language against Muslims, their practices, life and their prophet, the works of the Christian Arabs were gentler, more metaphorical and less aggressive towards Islam.

This phenomenon surely reflects the influence of the place upon writings of polemical texts upon style and tone. In the same connection, the works of Saint John of Damascus concerning Islam were written and kept in Greek, presumably to avoid any problems with Muslim authorities at this time. Furthermore, Theodore Abu-Qurrah, the Christian Arab theologian, remarkably, wrote some of his general theological works in Arabic, while his main polemical works against Islam were preserved only in Greek, though he himself appeared not to know Greek. Similarly,

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<sup>77</sup> - A. Vasiliev, 'The life of St. Theodore of Edessa'

<sup>78</sup> - It is well known that the 'Abbasid, who were stunned by the victories and claims of their rivals the Fatimids, held a special conference of notable Muslim scholars to refute the Fatimid's claims to be descendants of the prophet's daughter. However, some Muslim Sunni scholars, such as al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, who wrote a long list of accusations against the Fatimids, even accused them of being non-Muslims, co-operating with the Qaramiṭans, and betraying the Muslims by having close relations with Byzantium against Muslims, but remarkably he never alluded to such a text which, if indeed it had existed, would have given him a greater chance for yet more attack. Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīṭ dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, II, p. 342 et. Seq.

the Arabic version of the vita of Saint Theodore of Edessa omitted the name of the prophet Muḥammad several times.<sup>79</sup>

Among the notable facts we have a story,<sup>80</sup> written by two different Christian authors, one in Byzantium by Gregory of Dekapolis, and other by Ibn al-Muqaffa', the tenth century Coptic writer.<sup>81</sup> The most striking and substantial difference between the two texts is that the hero of the Byzantine text seems aggressive and tends to challenge Muslim public feeling and even insults their prophet seeking a Spanish type of martyrdom,<sup>82</sup> while the Coptic writer draws his hero as a peaceful young man who seeks peace in his new religion. This difference, obviously, indicates a sharp distinction in the attitude towards Islam, between Byzantines and the Arab Christians who were living under Muslim rule.

Another clear example of this coincidence between the place of writing or even reading the text and the tone of the text is in the works of Nicetas of Byzantium. His main work, the *anatrope* uses a very vehement language, and contains a long list of unpleasing epithets for Muḥammad, Muslims and the Qur'ān, even against God of Muḥammad. But his two letters to Muslims, apart from their doubtful authenticity, are

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<sup>79</sup> - Y. Meinaris and A. Selim, 'An Arabic version of the life of St. Theodore of Edessa (ar-Rahā) the Sabaite' *Graeco-Arabica* 2 (1983) p. 116; A. Vasiliev, 'The life of St. Theodore of Edessa', p. 197, note. 126.

<sup>80</sup> -The story tells of a young Muslim man, who tried to force his camels into a church, but miraculously all died. On another occasion this Muslim man interrupted a service in the church, but suddenly saw a priest carrying a young child, whom he slaughtered and drained the blood (sic); stunned of this scene he hastened to kill the priest, but to his surprise, he realised he is the only one who saw this vision and no one else saw this. Henceforth he converted to Christianity. It is noteworthy that a similar story known as the Vita of Antoine Ruwaḥ, which was circulated among the Christian Arabs, in which the Muslim young man saw the priest cutting meat off a white lamb. See Gregory Dekapolites, *Sancti Gregorii Decapolitae sermo historicus ulilissimus ac jucundissimus de vision, quam cum habuisset Sarracenus quidam, creditit et propter Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum martyria affectus* (A historical speech of Gregory Dekapolites, very profitable and most pleasing in many ways, about a vision which a Saracen once had, and who, as a result of this, believed and became a martyr for our lord Jesus Christ), PG 100, cols. 1201-1212, English translation, D. Sahas, 'What an infidel saw that a faithful did not: Georgory Dekpolites (d. 842), and Islam', *GOTR*, 31, no. 1-2, (1986) 47-67; the Coptic version, Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II, 3, pp. 110-111; Dick, I. 'La passion Arabie de St. Antoine Ruwaḥ, néo-martyre de Damas † 25 déc. 799', *Le Muséon*, 74 (1961) pp. 109-133.

<sup>81</sup> - Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Tārīkh*, II, 3, pp. 110-111.

remarkably softer in their language and tone. However, my main aim here is to emphasise the clear effect of certain factors such the place of writing and the target reader on the polemical text from every point of view.

Another factor which clearly affected the tone of the polemical works is the diplomatic nature of some letters reportedly exchanged between Byzantine writers and the Muslim sides. On the face of it, these letters, even those which are not fully authenticated, are characterised by relatively soft and more irenic language. They tended to take rational approach, yet are often mixed with some mockery. In the other texts, which are widely accepted as fake,<sup>83</sup> the later interpolator aptly introduces colouring of politeness and respect.

### **Translation of the Qur'ān into Greek.**

Unfortunately, there is insufficient information about or even reference to any Byzantine formal or individual attempt to translate the Qur'ān into Greek. Khoury suggests that Niketas of Byzantium was able to read Arabic and had an Arabic copy of the Qur'ān, which he used in his *anatrope*.<sup>84</sup> To be fair, it is impossible to eliminate the possibility of Niketas' knowledge of Arabic, but it is equally possible that he had a Greek translation of the Qur'ān. However, some hints in Niketas' writings and also in other Byzantine authors indicate clearly their lack of accurate knowledge of Arabic. The mistakes in Niketas' reading of the Qur'ān cast deep doubt on Khoury's theory. As Demetriades pointed out "his translation of the Arabic names in Greek does not

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<sup>82</sup> - On this Spanish phenomenon, see K. B. Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in the Muslim Spain*, (Cambridge University Press 1988).

<sup>83</sup> - Such as the dialogue between al-Kindī and his Muslim friend Hāshimī.

<sup>84</sup> -A. Khoury, *Les Théologiens Byzantines*, pp. 112-120; J. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 100.

show any originality”,<sup>85</sup> but most important his grave mistakes in several Arabic words, and some verses show clearly that he had not mastered the Arabic language.<sup>86</sup>

However, the wide, accurate and verbatim quotations of Nicetas of Byzantium from the Qur’ān indicate the strong probability that he had access to a copy of a complete translation of the Muslim sacred book in Greek. It is most likely that such a translation, if it did exist at all, would have been a work of one of the bilingual Christian Arabs or Arab renegades, who emigrated from Muslim lands, and worked in service of Byzantine authorities.

It well known that the Byzantine emperors obtained some copies of the Qur’ān, and apparently they kept these copies intact and realised the importance of the Muslim sacred book. The Arab sources confirm Byzantine possession of some copies of the Qur’ān which were used in diplomacy as gifts to mollify some Muslim rulers.<sup>87</sup> These copies presumably were seized in the Byzantine raids on Muslims cities. But it may be asked why the Byzantines left them intact? Was it in order to study and examine the Muslim sacred book? Or, as is more likely, to give them as a gesture to any Muslim caliph or emir?

In the light of a narrative of al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, concerning the Byzantine spies being sent to Mecca to examine the Muslim rites in their sacred city,<sup>88</sup> one might dare to suggest a formal policy by Byzantium of investigating Islam, which would be

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<sup>85</sup> -J. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 100.

<sup>86</sup> -Several Arabic words, which appeared in the Byzantine sources are misunderstood. The most famous one is al-ṣamad (الصمد), which was misunderstood by Byzantine authors as a sold stone (see a the study of D. Sahas devoted to this point, D. Sahas, ‘Holosphyros? A Byzantine perception of the God of Muhammad’. Al-‘alaq (العلق) appeared in the treatise of Niketas of Byzantium as ‘leech’, from which the human being was created, while in its context means coagulated blood or clot; rasūl allah (رسول الله) messenger of God, is a title in which Arethas confuses between Muḥammad (rasūl allah) for his formal adopted son Zāyd b. Ḥārithah. Arethas again confused two Arabic words, the Qur’ān (Muslim sacred book) and the Furqān, which is simply another name of the Qur’ān. One may add also, the confusion of the writer of the text which is attributed to John of Damascus between three some Arabic words (see chapter 1, pp. 88-92.).

<sup>87</sup> - In 265 H. Sept. 878 Aug 879, al-Ṭabarī speaks about an embassy from the Byzantine emperor (Basil I) to Aḥmad b. Ṭulūn, with some presents of Arab prisoners and some copies of the Qur’ān. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III, p. 1931.



achieved by keeping copies of the Qur'ān and sending spies to Mecca. Most likely, this was not the *ulterior motive* of Byzantine policy. Presumably, it was a normal matter of espionage between two main rivals in the east Mediterranean. Even if it were a religious exploration inside Muslim lands and studying their sacred book, it would have been fruitless for the Byzantine theologians, who appeared to make no use of those spies.<sup>89</sup>

### Warfare in polemical writings

Byzantine and Muslim theologians were sharply different in their attitude to the military activities that were taking place on the borders, the amount they knew about it and their willingness to discuss it. It seems that the Byzantine theologians who dealt with Islam paid special consideration to Jihad.<sup>90</sup> Niketas of Byzantium repeatedly accused Muḥammad of ordering his followers to attack and kill those who refused to accept his religion.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, Arethas of Caesarea vigorously attacked Jihad and linked it to Byzantine-Muslim warfare. Remarkably, however he pointed out that the Qur'ān commanded Muslims not to kill women or children.<sup>92</sup> Muslim theologians generally tended to involve themselves in the theological issues, with minimum attention to the Muslim-Byzantine struggle. The only exception is the Mu'tazilī thinker al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār.

It is noteworthy that some Arab Christian theologians abandoned their traditionally cautious ways and showed some sympathy towards Byzantium in its war against the Muslims. They consider the Muslims' Jihad against Byzantium an

<sup>88</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, II, p. 335.

<sup>89</sup> - Niketas of Byzantium declares explicitly that his source on the Muslim Haj was a former Muslim who converted to Christianity and lived in Byzantium. However, his hazy information on al-Haj may confute this and suggest a different source. Niketas, *Refut*, col. 720 c.

<sup>90</sup> - A. Khoury, *Polemique byzantine*, pp. 243-259.

<sup>91</sup> - Niketas, *Refut*, cols. 721, 837, 840, 744; Abū Qurrah, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq wa al-dīn al-qawīm*, p. 246; Bartholomew of Edessa, *Elenchus et confutatio Hgarenie*, col. 1433; c.f. J. M. Demetriades, *Nicetas of Byzantium*, p. 36; A. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine*, pp. 243-259.

unlawful and bloodthirsty act. In an anonymous text, the author describes a former Christian who converted to Islam and took part in the war against Byzantium only because of “his ignorance, youth and the evil company (i.e. the Muslims)” so he “killed, despoiled property, and violated the women of the enemy”.<sup>93</sup> The same expression was repeated in the anonymous life of another former Muslim convert.<sup>94</sup> Abu Qurrah alluded to Muslim jihad in his comparison between Christianity and other religions; though he cautiously avoids mentioning Islam by name, nevertheless his allusion is explicit.<sup>95</sup>

### **Muhammad: prophet or military leader?**

One of the main differences between the Byzantine and Muslim polemics was the sharply different attitudes to Jesus and Muhammad. While the Byzantine authors, especially Niketas of Byzantium, George Hamartolos and Bartholomew of Edessa, use a very long list of the most horrible epithets against Muhammad, the Muslim writers followed the Qur’ān in paying respect to Jesus, though they considered him to be human and a prophet with no divine nature at all,<sup>96</sup> which was considered blasphemy in the Christian understanding and response to Islam. It is noteworthy that some Byzantine writers were aware of the Muslims’ veneration of Christ and even used that in their apologetics against Muslims.<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, in the Byzantine epic *Digenis Akrites*, one can find an allusion that Muslims ‘too honour’ him.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>92</sup> - Arethas, *Scripta Minora*, I, pp. 242-243, French trans. A. Abel, ‘La lettre polémique d’Aréthas’, p.367.

<sup>93</sup> - S. Griffith, ‘The Arabic account of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ an-naḡrānī al-Ghasānī’ ed. and English translation, *Le Muséon* 98 (1985) pp. 331-374, esp. p. 362. The English translation of Griffith is not accurate at this point.

<sup>94</sup> - I. Dick, ‘La passion Arabie de S. Antoine Ruwah, néo-martyre de Damas’, *Le Muséon* 74 (1961) p. 126. The alleged new convert considers his contribution in the jihad against Byzantium as a sin which will not be forgiven unless he becomes a martyr.

<sup>95</sup> - Abū Qurrah, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq wa al-dīn al-qawīm*, p. 246.

<sup>96</sup> - Qur’ān, 3:59; 5:75; 9:30; 4:172.

<sup>97</sup> - The letter attributed to the emperor Leo III, see A. Jeffery, ‘Ghevond’s text: The letters of ‘Umar to Leo’ p. 286; Arethas, *Scripta Minora*, I, p. 234, French trans. A. Abel, ‘La lettre polémique d’Aréthas’, p. 358

<sup>98</sup> - *Digenes Akrites*, p. 55.

My main concern here is the depiction of Muḥammad as a military leader, and its connection with actual Byzantine-Muslim relations.<sup>99</sup> Doctrina Jacobi is certainly the first ever Christian text to speak about Muḥammad. The explicit expression “Μὴ γὰρ προφήται μετὰ ξίφους καὶ ἄρματος ἔρχονται”<sup>100</sup> establishes the fundamental nature of the Byzantine attitude towards Muḥammad as a prophet and a statesman. Obviously, in this particular point, i.e. the perception of Muḥammad and his life, the Byzantine theologians took the leading role. For the Christian Arabs, this topic was taboo and a dangerous land mine which would cost them heavily,<sup>101</sup> while the Byzantines were freer to express their opinion as vehemently as they wished. For most of them Muḥammad and his book were the only motive for the war waged by Muslims against them, to “convert the Romans to be Saracens.”<sup>102</sup>

Muslim theologians were aware of such accusations against their prophet. They turned to the Old Testament to find examples of prophets who had led armies and killed their enemies. Even so, as the Muslims pointed out, they did not offer the traditional Muslim triple choice, Islam, or Jizya or war, but simply annihilated their enemies.<sup>103</sup> Only al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār to replied the Byzantine accusations, and at the same time exploited the Byzantine advances in northern Syria against the Muslims in the tenth century and their capture of 20 million Muslims,<sup>104</sup> who were forced to convert to Islam.<sup>105</sup> He simply summarized his theory saying, “There is no sword

<sup>99</sup> -On Muḥammad’s representation in the Byzantine sources, see the lengthy study of A. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine*, pp. 21-140.

<sup>100</sup> - Doctrina Jacobi, p. 209.

<sup>101</sup> - See the answer of patriarch Timothy in his alleged dialogue with the caliph al-Mahdi, when he was asked about Muḥammad. He said, “He walked in the path of the prophets”. Timothy I, *L’église et L’Islam sous Timothée*, p. 31.

<sup>102</sup> -Niketas, *Refut.*, col.s 840A; Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, says the Rum (Byzantines) did not find any blemish in Muḥammad, so they carp at his sword and polygamy. Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīṭ dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 190.

<sup>103</sup> -‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, pp. 130-131; Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīṭ dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 188.

<sup>104</sup> - An extreme exaggeration.

<sup>105</sup> - Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīṭ dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 182-183.

which was carried unfairly except the Christian one.”<sup>106</sup> He and Ibn Ḥazm recall the early history of Byzantium and attribute a crucial role to the emperor Constantine the Great in supporting the spread of Christianity by the sword,<sup>107</sup> while only a few Muslim theologians hinted at Jesus’ order to his disciples to sell their clothes and buy swords.<sup>108</sup>

### The Old Testament between Muslims and Christians:

Evidently, the Old Testament became the battlefield upon which the Muslim and Christian polemicists clashed. Since the early centuries of Christianity, before the rise of Islam, Christian thinkers had turned to the Old Testament, searching for Christian exegesis to support their debates against Jews.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, when the debates against Muslims reached their climax in the ninth and tenth centuries, both Muslims and Christian theologians used the Old Testament to support their argument.

It seems that the vision of Daniel greatly attracted Christian and Muslim theologians. Each of them put a different interpretation on the same story to confirm one point of view or another and give it a kind of prophetic support.<sup>110</sup> Remarkably, Liudprand of Cremona alluded to some kind of sharing belief by Muslims and Greeks in Daniel’ vision.<sup>111</sup> Presumably, he did not realise that this “Vision of Daniel” comes from Old Testament, and had heard some popular interpretations of Daniel’s visions

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<sup>106</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> - Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīr dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 161-164; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, p. 87.

<sup>108</sup> - ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, p. 133. (Luke 22: 37)

<sup>109</sup> - J. Pelikan, *The Christian tradition, a history of the development of doctrine: II, the spirit of eastern Christianity (600-1700)*, pp. 208-210.

<sup>110</sup> - Among the Christian texts using the vision are, an anonymous Coptic text; dialogue of the patriarch Timothy I with the caliph al-Mahdī; see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it*, p. 289.

As for the Muslim sources there are: ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Book of the religion and empire*, pp. 113-118; he also used several prophecies of the Old Testament; Ibn Ḥazm in his poem against the Byzantine emperor Nikephoros Phokas, al-Subki, *Ṭabqāt al-shāfi‘iyya*, II, p. 189. A later Muslim theologian, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350 A.D. /751 H.) uses this vision as well as others, see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, pp. 165-167.

It is interesting that in the name of Daniel’s vision a certain man forged visions concerning some of disguised men in the court, attributing it to Daniel. Even he was known as Danyālī. Al-Ḥamadānī, *Takmilat tarīkh al-Ṭabarī*, p. 64.

rather than polemical writings; this fact is important as it shows the overlap between professional polemic and popular myths.

However, one of the themes which seem to be extended from the Jewish-Christian debates to Muslim-Christian polemic is the validation of Moses' law.<sup>112</sup> While the Qur'ān announced the end of both Moses' and Jesus' mission to humankind,<sup>113</sup> the Muslim thinkers, especially the late ones, upon mastering the knowledge of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, observed suspiciously contemporary Christian life and practice and compared them with that of the Bible, to prove that Christians had gone astray from the true way of God as well as noting concurrence between the Bible (the Old Testament) and the Qur'ān.<sup>114</sup> The issues under dispute which were pointed out by Muslim theologians are eating pork, the direction of prayers, observing the Sabbath, and finally the circumcision.<sup>115</sup>

At the same time, Muslims had often used stories of Old Testament prophets to defend Islamic dogmas against Christian polemic. If Muḥammad had several wives, so did all those prophets admired by Christians. If Jesus had performed all these wonderful miracles, so had the previous prophets, and even more.<sup>116</sup> If Jesus had no father, neither had Adam father nor mother.

On their side, the Byzantine polemicists drew heavily on the Old Testament. They repeatedly declared that Jesus was heralded by other prophecies in the Old Testament, the crucifixion was announced before, and the sacrifice of the Son of God

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<sup>111</sup> - Liudparnd of Cremona, *The works*, pp. 257-258.

<sup>112</sup> - On the justification and continuation of Moses' law between Christians and Jews, see J. Pelikan, *The Christian tradition, a history of the development of doctrine: II, the spirit of eastern Christianity (600-1700)* pp. 214-215.

<sup>113</sup> - Qur'ān, 3:85.

<sup>114</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār referred to the confirmation of Jesus (Mathew 5:17) that he did not come to destroy the ancient laws, but to fulfil them. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 188.

<sup>115</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 149-152. (He listed pork, the Sabbath, divorce, fasting, circumcision, and the regulations to do with the inheritance)

<sup>116</sup> - Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, pp. 278-293.

was hinted at to mankind. Interestingly, the Muslim theologians used the same technique, searching in the Old Testament to prove that the prophecy of Muḥammad had been announced in advance in the Old Testament.<sup>117</sup> The Byzantines, however, judged the righteous of Islam on the grounds of the Bible, especially the Old Testament.<sup>118</sup>

While most of the early Muslim theologians tend to accept the authenticity of the Old Testament, and some parts of the New Testament, yet they maintain the Qur'ānic accusations against Christians that they altered the Bible.<sup>119</sup> Ibn Ḥazm totally denied the authenticity of both the Old and New Testaments, though he made use of the Old Testament to confirm the prophecy of Muḥammad.<sup>120</sup> This new attitude developed gradually in Muslim theology and most of the late writers vigorously reject both the New and Old Testaments.

### The icons and relics in polemic

Among the main differences between Islam and Christianity is the attitude towards the veneration of icons and relics of saints. While Islam strictly forbids any veneration of icons or relics, the cult of the icons was widely known among Christians. In the Byzantine-Muslim polemic, as well as military and political relations with Muslims, relics and icons received a considerable attention. Almost all Muslim writers saw this cult as an actual worship (عبادة) of these lifeless objects, and a direct development of idolatry.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, I, pp. 112-113; 'Alī Al-Ṭabrī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, pp. 73-124; Ibn Abī al-Lāith, *Lettre du Calife Hārūn*, pp. 55-58 (Arabic text) pp. 64-66 (French translation); Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, pp. 109-173.

<sup>118</sup> - Niketas, *Refut.*, cols. 704.

<sup>119</sup> - For a collection of fragments from most of the Muslim theologians concerning the Muslim notion of alteration of the Bible, see R. Caspar; and J. M. Gaudeul, 'Textes sur le tahrif des écritures', *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980) 61-104. Arabic fragments with French translation and comments.

<sup>120</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, I, p. 112.

<sup>121</sup> - Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, p. 167; Anonymous, 'Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d'époque 'Abbaside contre les chrétiens', ed. and French trans. D Sourdei, p. 29.

Ibn Ḥazm recalled the story of the discovery of the so-called true cross, (on which Jesus was reportedly crucified, according to common belief) and wondered how these relics could have stayed intact while the whole city of Jerusalem was deserted for 270 years,<sup>122</sup> when its Christians populations were a persecuted minority. He compared this with the relics of Muḥammad, (the sword and bowl) which were almost lost, despite the continuation of the Muslim sovereignty in the east and west.<sup>123</sup>

Evidently the Muslims collected the relics of their prophet with a certain degree of veneration,<sup>124</sup> but certainly without religious orientation or attributing miracles to them. Presumably, these relics had a political rather than religious importance. They were used by the 'Abbasid caliphs as the legitimate heirs of the prophet, and were widely regarded as symbols of the caliphs.<sup>125</sup> Notwithstanding, even this symbolic role appears gradually to have faded.<sup>126</sup> Only a few Byzantine writers seem to have realised this Muslim veneration of their relics and alluded to it. To my knowledge, it is only Arethas of Caesarea who alludes to this practice.<sup>127</sup>

Still, the sacred places on both sides received some attention from the writers, as well as having some impact on the polemic between Muslims and Byzantium. We do have stories of both sides attributing miracles to their sacred places against the blasphemy of their foes. One of these is a Christian story of a light or fire, which

<sup>122</sup> -Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Roman army under the command of Titus, son of the emperor Vespasian (69-79 A.D.), but even so, some of the Jews stayed in the ruined city. Seven decades later, the Roman armies restored the city again and called it Aelia Capitolina. On Jerusalem before the Arabs, see J. Wilkinson, 'Jerusalem under Rome and Byzantium: 63 BC-637 AD', in K. J. Asali, (ed.) *Jerusalem in history*, (Essex 1989) pp. 75-105.

<sup>123</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, 2, p. 87. pp. 88- 130.

<sup>124</sup> -The cloak of the prophet, his stake (Qaḍīb), and sword were symbols of the caliphate and they have been used in several celebrations. Al-Māwardī, *al-aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya*, p. 171; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 2, p. 771, 925, III, 3, p. 1646; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 273 (979 /369H.)

<sup>125</sup> - Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III: 2, p. 771.

<sup>126</sup> -Ibn Ibn Khaldūn counts the symbols of authority in Muslim civilizations (mainly the caliphate); he mentions the coinage, banners, drums and al-Sarīr (the throne?). Remarkably he did not refer to the prophet's relics. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-muqadimmah*, pp. 257-268; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, 2, p. 88.

<sup>127</sup> - Arethas, *Scripa minora*, I, p. 238-239; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas' letter to the emir at Damascus', p. 297, French translation. A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas' p. 363.

ignites miraculously in the holy Church in Jerusalem. Ibn al-Qalānsī discusses and refutes the Christian claims of the miraculous light in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.<sup>128</sup> This was used in the Byzantine polemic as a proof of rightness of Christianity.<sup>129</sup> Surprisingly, al-Mas'ūdī seems to accept the miraculous nature of this fire.<sup>130</sup> Presumably, some members of Muslim laity may have had the same feeling. Equally, various Muslim writers attributed miracles to the mosque and the tomb of the prophet against some Byzantine workers who tried to desecrate (*danas*) the sacred place.<sup>131</sup>

### Miracles in the polemic

The dispute over the issue of miracles gradually absorbed more and more attention in Muslim theology, though it received scant attention, if not at all, in the early Muslim *kalam*,<sup>132</sup> and the Muslims have varied in their attitude towards miracles.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, it was a main theme of the Christian-Muslim polemic.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>128</sup> -Ibn al-Qalānsī, pp. 67-77; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, II, p. 75. See F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem*, pp. 261-267.

<sup>129</sup> -Arethas, *Scripa minora*, I, p. 240; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas' letter to the emir at Damascus', p. 298; French translation, A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas à l'Émir de Damas' p. 365.

<sup>130</sup> -Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 2, p. 200.

<sup>131</sup> -Ibn Rustah, p. 99. See a discussion of other Muslim sources, supra, chapter 2, p. 147, note 210.

<sup>132</sup> - Several Muslim thinkers devote some treatises or books to discussion of the nature of the miracles of the prophets and distinguish between them and those put down to magic. Al-Jāhīz composed a lost book or treatise on the miracles and magic. Al-Jāhīz, *al-Ḥayawān*, I, p. 5.

Fortunately a similar work of al-Baqillānī survived and has already been published. *Kitāb al-Biyān bayn al-mu'jizāt wa al-karāmāt wa al-ḥiyyal wa al-kahānh wa al-siḥr wa al-narinjāt* (A treatise on the nature of the apologetic miracle and its differentiation from charisms, trickery, divination, magic and spells) ed. R. J. McCarthy (Beirut 1958)

<sup>133</sup> -The Muslims in their attitude towards miracles can be divided into two main parts, ahl al-Sunnah or Orthodox Muslims, who strongly believed in the miracles attributed to Muḥammad. Among those Muslims one can list the names of 'Alī Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, and Ibn Ḥazm. A large number of this sect, especially the later ones, tended to believe in the miracles by other distinguished Muslims as well. The other Muslims somehow accepted cautiously most of these miracles of the prophet while denying some of them, especially those attributed to Muslim Sufis. Al-Mu'tazialah formed the major part of this second group who were sceptical towards miracles. However, al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jābar, a prominent member of this school, accepted the authenticity of these miracles and even attacked his fellow scholar al-Nazām, who denied some of the prophet's miracles. Apart from these two main groups, there were several smaller sects who exaggerated in attributing all kinds of miracles not only to the prophets but also to some pious Muslims. Al-Ash'arī, *kitāb maqālāt al-'islāmiyyin*, pp. 438-439; al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīṭ dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 55-59. Remarkably he says (p. 181) that he does not accept any miracles of anyone after the prophet, which is an allusion to the increasing tendency among Muslims to attribute miracles to pious and prominent Muslims. The same views were expressed by Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, p. 74.



In the biography of Muḥammad, and late Muslim theological works, a large number of miracles are attributed to him by several Muslim writers.<sup>135</sup> Among these miracles is the feeding a huge number of men with the milk of only one sheep.<sup>136</sup> A similar narrative occurred in the raid of Tabūk, when there was a shortage of food in the Muslim camp, so 'Umar suggested that the prophet should bless the rest of the food. According to the narrative, once he did, the food was enough for the whole army.<sup>137</sup> There are several other miracles attributed to Muḥammad, either in performing supernatural tasks, or foretelling of the future.

D. Sahas argues that the Muslims' writings about the miracles attributed to their prophet were developed and even invented in response to the Christian polemic, which usually uses the miracles of Jesus comparing him with Muḥammad.<sup>138</sup> His hypothesis, however seems to be a mere generalisation, inasmuch as the accounts of the miracles in Islam were developed in a different way. Firstly, the miracles and stories of the extraordinary power of the individuals were a part of the pre-Islamic milieu, and kept alive in the Arabs' memory after the advent of Islam.<sup>139</sup> Yet there is a significant similarity, as D. Sahas has pointed out, between some of the miracles attributed to Muḥammad and those known of Jesus; but one may say also that the

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"لأننا نمنع أن يكون مع أحد بعد نبينا آية أو معجزة، وما ندعي أنه آية ومعجزة فهو ما حمله كل من سمع الأخبار، وهو هذا القرن وما جاء مجيء القرن"

<sup>134</sup> - D. Thomas, 'The miracles of Jesus in early Islamic polemic', *JSS* 39/2 (1994) 221-43.

<sup>135</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, I, p. 105; II, 2, p. 82, 84, 86-87; al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 203-204; 'Abd allah b. Abi 'Ilān from Mu'tazilah (d. 409H.) composed a book about the prophet in which he attributed more than 1000 miracles to the prophet. Ibn Taghrī Bardī, 4, p. 243

<sup>136</sup> - Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3: 377.

<sup>137</sup> - Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3: 11.

<sup>138</sup> - D. Sahas, 'the formation of the later Islamic doctrines as a response to Byzantine polemics: The miracles of Muhammad', *GOTR* 27 (1982) 307-24.

<sup>139</sup> - Among these stories, is a story of a miracle attributed to the tomb of Ḥatim al-Ṭā'ī (the man most famous of his generosity man in Arabic history). Some narratives say there were some stone statues of girls near his tomb, which used to wail all the night. Another story says a foolish man stayed one night near this tomb and asked the dead person (presumably sarcastically) to host him; later at night in his dream he saw Ḥatim telling him that he killed his camel and will use it to host the man and his fellows. In the morning the man found his camel slaughtered. Some days later on his return, he met the son of Ḥatim looking for him, and told him that his father had appeared to him (in a dream)

documentation of Muḥammad's miracles had coincided with the tendency to attribute miracles to early or even late pious Muslims,<sup>140</sup> and even some Muslim theologians complained bitterly of the wide range of miracles attributed to some Muslim clerics or Sufis.<sup>141</sup> This seemingly general and fast-growing tendency cannot simply be attributed to the Christian polemic. H. Kennedy points out that "If the Muslims had invented their Muḥammad to rival Christ, they would certainly have stressed the miraculous".<sup>142</sup>

In fact, the Qur'ān is considered to be Muḥammad's main miracle. Its preternatural eloquence and foretelling of the future stories as well as the narrative of stories from the past, are the main aspects of its miraculous nature.<sup>143</sup> Almost all Muslim theologians accepted the Qur'ān as a miracle in its language and style, which cannot be reproduced by human being. The only exception, to my knowledge, is a small number of Mu'tazilah, among them al-Nazām (Mu'tazili thinker, d. 847AD / 232H.) who denied the uniqueness of the language itself. In his opinion, the actual miracles consist of its being able to tell unknown future or past stories.<sup>144</sup>

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and ordered his to give this camel in place of other. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Maḥāsīn wa al-aḍāḍ*, p. 82; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, II, pp. 169-170.

<sup>140</sup> -As early as the ninth century, simultaneously with accounts of Muḥammad's miracles, the Muslim notion of Sainthood was growing and had begun to take shape of a phenomenon, and those Muslim saints **أولياء** began to enjoy a growing reputation among the Muslim laity; from this point henceforth, the notion of miracles widened in Muslim life. See al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī, (d. circa 905-910 A.D. / 295-300 A. H.) *The concept of sainthood in early Islamic mysticism: two works by al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī*, trans. B. Radtke and J. O'Kane, Curzon Sufi Series (1996 Surrey). In this book the author explains the position of those *friends of God*. For a wider discussion on this topic see R. Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes* (Wiesbaden 1987).

<sup>141</sup> -Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīṭ dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 210; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, p. 74. It is noteworthy that al-Bāqillānī (like most of ahl al-Sunnah, the Orthodox Muslims) accepted the miracles of the pious Muslims (Awliyyā') al-Baqillānī, *Kitāb al-Biyān*, p. 48. On the attitude of the Muslim sects towards the miracles of the pious, see Al-Ash'arī, Abū al-Ḥasan, *kitāb maqālāt al-'islāmiyyin wa 'ikhtlāf al-muṣliyyīn*, (die dogmatischen lehren der anhängen des Islam) ed. H. Ritter (Wiesbaden 1963) pp. 438-439.

<sup>142</sup> - H. Kennedy, *The prophet and the age of the caliphates*, p. 357.

<sup>143</sup> - "Say if the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support" Qur'ān, 17:88. Al-Bāqillānī devoted one of his books to the miracles of the Qur'ān, in which he focused mainly on the linguistic aspects. Al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (Cairo 1930).

<sup>144</sup> - The other thinkers who denies the miracles of the language of the Qur'ān are, Hihsām al-Fūṭī and 'Abād b. Sulaymān. Al-Ash'arī, *kitāb maqālāt al-'islāmiyyīn*, p. 225; al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār,

However, the issue of miracles was employed widely in the Christian polemic in general, and in Byzantine polemic in particular. Byzantine writers used Jesus' miracles as a testimony of his message and a proof of the rightness of Christianity. At the same time, they denied the prophethood of Muḥammad on the basis of the lack of such miracles.<sup>145</sup> In a few cases, when they appeared to be acquainted or informed of some miracles attributed to Muḥammad, they denied the narratives or at best mocked them.<sup>146</sup>

In the Muslim polemic, al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār wrote a lengthy critique of Christian hagiography. He summarised some miracles of the saints, presumably those who were known among the Christian Arabs, and mocked their exaggeration.<sup>147</sup> He even pointed out that some Muslims copied the same attitude and attributed miracles to prominent Muslim figures such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Ma'rūf al-Karkhī.<sup>148</sup> Similarly, Ibn Ḥazm adopted the same attitude and associated the Christian claims of miracles of their saints with narratives of miracles attributed to pious Muslims, which were widely circulated in the Muslim world.<sup>149</sup>

But Muslim theologians, though they accepted the miracles of Jesus, at the same time strongly denied their uniqueness. To support this hypothesis, they

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*Tathbīṭ dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 55-59. On al-Nazām, his life and works, see 'A. Badwī, *Madhāhib al-Islāmīn*, I, pp. 198-279.

<sup>145</sup> - Abū Qurra, *Contra Haereticos, Judaeos et Saracenos varia opuscula*, Opusculum 19, cols. 1544-1545; Idem, 'Deux écrits inédits de Theodore Abu Qurrah', ed and French translation, I. Dick, *La Muséon* 72 (1959) pp. 63-64.; Niketas of Byzantium, *Refut. col. 76*; Arethas, *Scripa minora*, I, p. 234; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas' letter to the emir at Damascus', p. 293, French translation. A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas' p. 357; Sa'id b. Bātrīq, *kitāb al-Burhān*, I, pp. 91-96; Bartholomew of Edessa, *Elenchus et confutatio*, col. 1302. See A. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine*, pp. 42-58.

<sup>146</sup> - Bartholomew of Edessa, *PG* 104, 1429d, 1432 d; the emperor Basil II commented sarcastically on the miracles of Muḥammad, in his dialogue with the Muslim theologian al-Bāqillānī, see al-Qādī 'Iyād's, *Tartīb al-madārik wa taqrīb al-masālik li ma'rīfat al'lām madhhab al-imām Mālik*, published as an appendix of al-Baqillānī, *al-tamhīd* (ed. Cairo) p. 254; Niketas of Byzantium, *Refut.*, col. 769. (His allusions do not seem to indicate his awareness of the miracles attributed to Muḥammad related to the moon)

<sup>147</sup> - Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīṭ dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp 202-208. Remarkably, he (p. 208) quotes the comments of the Christian thinkers Mata (Matthew) b. Yūnis (d. 940 /328 H.) describing the Christians' narratives of the miracles of their saints as worthless.

compared Jesus' miracles with the stories of ancient prophets in the Old Testament, to refute the Byzantine claims of the superiority of Jesus in terms of miracles.<sup>150</sup>

### Moral life in polemic

Presumably, Byzantine perceptions of the Muslims' moral life was a kind of myths similar to that of *one thousand and one nights*. Such an idea seems to have been deeply rooted in the Byzantine writings for a long time.<sup>151</sup> One may explain this on the basis of some certain facts. First, the historical misunderstandings of polygamy; second, the repercussions and echoes of the luxury and even fantasy life of some Muslim rulers. Eventually, the Byzantine polemical writers were more or less influenced by the news or even rumours of the life led by some of the contemporary Muslim rulers. The luxury life, the harem fantasy stories and the legends about the Muslims' sexual life had a deep impact on the polemical works. These alleged stories of such lustful life, apparently reached the Byzantine world, through merchants, prisoners of war and ambassadors from both sides.<sup>152</sup> Byzantines writers, and most probably the laity as well, saw Islam through the worst behaviour of some of their contemporaneous Muslims, just as in modern times, when the West thinks of Islam is somehow connected with terrorism. At the same time, the exaggerations, and

<sup>148</sup> - Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 210.

<sup>149</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, p. 5; V, p. 4.

<sup>150</sup> - Anonymous, 'Un pamphlet musulman anonyme', (the so called 'Umar II letter) pp. 27-28, French translation pp. 14-15; al-Bāqillānī, *al-tamhīd* (ed. Cairo) p. 255; al-Māturīdī, *kitāb al-tawhīd*, pp. 211-212; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, pp. 278-287. See D. Thomas, 'The miracles of Jesus in early Islamic polemic', *JSS* 39/2 (1994) pp. 221-43.

<sup>151</sup> - Niketas of Byzantium, *Refut*, cols. 829 - 832; Arethas, *Scripa minora*, I, p. 234; P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Arethas' letter to the emir at Damascus', p. 293, French translation. A. Abel, 'La lettre polémique d'Aréthas' p. 356; Abū Qurrah, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq wa al-dīn al-qawīm*, p. 246. *Anna Comnena, Aléxiad*, ed. B. Leib, II: 10, p. 208, English trans. E.R.A. Sewter, p. 310. See A. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine*, pp. 260-269.

<sup>152</sup> - Ibn 'Idharay, narrates that the Aghlabī emir of North Africa, Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghalab (800-812 A.D./ 184-197 H.) fell in love with a page and even had his name engraved on the coins. Notably, the same emir received in the same year 907AD /294 H. an embassy from Constantinople, which means that such an extraordinary story could have been carried the Byzantine lands. Another Muslim ruler 'Izz al-Dawlah Daylamite Būyids *de facto* ruler of Baghdad, lost his beloved page in a battle against a rival emir, thereafter he was plunged into deep sorrow, which treated as a joke among his

deliberate distortion of Islam and Muslims in some Byzantine writings should not be ignored.

Muslim theologians were conscious of this attitude, and their reaction to the Byzantine accusations was varied. While some merely recalled and elaborated stories of ascetic and pious Muslims, especially early ones, others turned to a counter-attack against Christian moral standards. 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī was aware of the Christian's colouring the whole of Islam with the luxury life of certain Muslim contemporary rulers. Subsequently, he paid special attention, in his address to the Christians, to bringing out stories of the humble Muslim caliphs, as well as some prominent members of the early Muslim community.<sup>153</sup> Contrary to most of the Muslim apologists, he carefully avoided any direct attack against Christian moral standards, presumably out of respect to his Christian family. Al-Jāhiz pointed to the lack of *Hudūd* (punishment imposed by religion) in Christianity, which in his point of view, left Christians free to act without restriction in their daily life.<sup>154</sup> His fellow Mu'tazili, al-Qāḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār, devoted a considerable part of his book *Tathbīḥ dalā'il al-mubuwwah* to attacking the Christian moral life, especially those of the Byzantines. His strategy was far from defending Islam against any possible Christian accusations; rather it was a lengthy and vigorous attack against Byzantine women, nuns, and the whole society in general.<sup>155</sup>

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya posed an interesting question as asked by a non-Muslim. The question is, how can we accept (O Muslim) the rightness of Islam, when we can see that most Muslims (presumably in his time) are sinful? He challenged and refuted this question, simply by saying "Muslims are monotheistic, hence any other

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subjects. Ibn 'Idharay, *al-bayān al-mughrib* I, pp. 139-140; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-'Islām*, p. 263 (976 /366.H)

<sup>153</sup> - 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa l-dawla*, pp. 54-65.

<sup>154</sup> - Al-Jāhiz, *al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 22.

sins may be forgiven". Soon he turned against Jews and Christians, devoted a large part of his book to refuting their dogmas and exposing their mistakes, which in his opinion, were greater than any sin a Muslim might commit.<sup>156</sup>

At the same time, monastic life and monogamy had helped to spread a notion among the Muslim laity, that Christianity was a hard religion; they were used more or less in some Christian writings to supporting Christianity as a divine religion which encouraged its believers to live a spiritual life rather than a material one. Abū-Qurrah, the Arab-Byzantine writer, accused Muslims of paying too much attention to their lusts and passions.<sup>157</sup> Muslim theologians denied vigorously the Christian accusations and often referred to the nature of Christianity as a religion without restraints, for the sacrifice of Christ had washed away all the sins of the Christians, which as Qaḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār pointed out, encouraged people to live an immoral life.<sup>158</sup> Even the Christians' claims in their apology that their religion was hard and required more self-discipline,<sup>159</sup> in the conflict with 'Abd al-Jabbār's view; he believe that this is not a valid proof of its rightness, otherwise the Indian religions would be better, as they have more asceticism than Christianity.<sup>160</sup>

Another phase of the debates on morals appears in the allegation exchanged Muslims and Byzantines of being cruel and merciless. In this unique point they mix the military and the polemic considerations. On the issue, the patriarch Nicholas I lays a special stress on the Roman "mercy and benevolence".<sup>161</sup> In a sharper tone, he adds, "the mercy of the Roman race does not imitate your savagery"<sup>162</sup> Muslim theologians appeared to be acquainted with such claims inasmuch as they controvert them in their

<sup>155</sup> - Al-Qaḍī 'Abd al-Jābbar, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwah*, I, pp. 167-173, 190-191

<sup>156</sup> - Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, pp. 243-299.

<sup>157</sup> - Abū Qurra, *Maymar fī wujūd al-khāliq wa al-dīn al-qawīm*, p. 246.

<sup>158</sup> - Al-Qaḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwah*, I, pp. 187-188.

<sup>159</sup> - S. K. Samir (ed.) *Une Correspondance islamo-chrétienne*, p. 178.

<sup>160</sup> - Al-Qaḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwah*, I, p. 187; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fisal*, II, p. 74.

apologies. Al-Jāhiz argued that the Byzantines are far from being merciful, as they castrate their children and Muslim children whom they capture.<sup>163</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues, taking a different approach, that if they argue that Jesus infinitely merciful, he (as their God) is responsible for all the deaths, diseases and suffering of animals.<sup>164</sup>

Evidently the mounting attention or rather aggression from the Byzantine theologians towards the Muslims’ moral standards brought to the fore a similar issue. This is the Muslims’ notion of life in paradise, which, according to the Qur’ān, will reward the virtuous with heavenly wives and rivers of milk, honey and wine.<sup>165</sup> The Byzantines were fully aware of these promises made to Muslims, and as early as John of Damascus, the life in paradise became one of the essential points in the Byzantine polemic against Islam.<sup>166</sup>

Surprisingly a Melkite Christian writer from the eleventh century used the same Muslim notion, even quoting the Qur’ānic phraseology verbatim to motivate his Christian readers to be steadfast in their religion.<sup>167</sup>

On their side, Muslim theologians used the Bible to defend their creed and refute the Christian accusations.<sup>168</sup> They mostly used allusions in the Bible to eating and drinking in paradise.<sup>169</sup> Ibn Ḥazm mocked at the Christians asking, if God (i.e. Christ) had eaten fish and honey, what is strange if human beings eat in heaven, even

<sup>161</sup> - Nicholas I, *Letters*, p. 375.

<sup>162</sup> - Nicholas I, *Letters*, p. 379.

<sup>163</sup> - Al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, I, p. 59, 80.

<sup>164</sup> - Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīt dalā’il al-nubuwah*, I, p. 189.

<sup>165</sup> - Qur’ān, 44: 54; 52:20; 55:72; 56:22; al-Aṣbhāni, *Ṣifat al-Jannah*, (account of paradise) ed. A. Riḍā, 3 vols. (Damascus 1995) pp. 199-224. See F. Rosenthal, ‘Reflections on love in paradise’.

<sup>166</sup> - Abū Qurra, *Maymar fī wujūd al-khāliq wa al-dīn al-qawīm*; pp. 210, 252; Arethas, *Scripta Minora*, I, p. 243, French trans. A. Abel, ‘La lettre polémique d’Aréthas’, p. 368. See A Khoury, *Polémique byzantine*, pp. 304-311.

<sup>167</sup> - Sulaymān al-Ghāzi, *al-Diwān*, p. 207, verse 20.

جمالهن على الفردوس إعجابا

ولا يزوجكم حورا فيعجبكم

<sup>168</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, pp. 108-109; Anonymous, ‘un pamphlet musulman anonyme’, p. 31 (The Arabic text) p. 22 (D. Sourdel’s French translation)

<sup>169</sup> - Luke 14: 15; 22:29,18.

after they have become angels or like angels?<sup>170</sup> He used the story of the Old Testament of the visit of the angels to Abraham in which they ate his food,<sup>171</sup> and comments again that if these angelic creatures can eat so can the human beings in heaven.<sup>172</sup> In another part of the same book, Ibn Ḥazm puts a more spiritual colour on the notion of paradise. He says, “The corporal life there in heaven, including food and other aspects, is entirely different from that the human concept but merely has similar names so that the human beings can understand it”.<sup>173</sup>

### Christian councils in polemic

Christian ecumenical councils and their crucial role in the formation of the Christian dogmas were, from the Muslim point of view, the *de facto* founders, or rather the distorters of Christianity. Most of the Muslim writers paid special attention to what they saw as unique and human interventions to change divine inspiration and religious dogmas, which should be sacred and intact.<sup>174</sup>

Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār considered the ecumenical councils as human interventions and a non-divine source for Christian belief. He narrates some examples of alterations and a change made by human councils, such as allowing marriage of the clergy and tells a story of a bishop in Samarqand who allegedly forbade eating pigeons because the Holy Spirit descended to Jesus in the form of a dove pigeon.<sup>175</sup>

Similarly Ibn Ḥazm reads the words attributed to Jesus, “Verily I say unto you,

<sup>170</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, pp. 45, 106-107

<sup>171</sup> - Genesis, 18:8.

<sup>172</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, p. 45.

<sup>173</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, pp. 107-108.

<sup>174</sup> - Among the later Muslim theologians, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, drawing heavily on the narratives of Sa‘īd b. Bāṭriq, deals with the issue of councils in considerable detail. Although his knowledge on the chronology of these councils seems to be hazy and inaccurate, inasmuch as he considers the Council of Chalcedon, as the 6<sup>th</sup> council. Furthermore he says that the ninth council was held during the reign of Mu‘āwiya I (661-680AD./ 41-60H.). Presumably these mistakes are originally from Sa‘īd b. Bāṭriq who proved to be unacquainted with the events in Byzantium. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, pp. 313-339.

<sup>175</sup> - Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 174-175. c.f. Luke, 3: 21-22; Mathew, 3: 16.



whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”,<sup>176</sup> and wonders how the legislation could be handed to those disciples, while Jesus himself said “I did not come to change the Law”.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, Ibn Ḥazm wonders, how Christ, (the Christian God) can bestow such great authority on his twelve disciples, including Judas, who would soon betrayed him.<sup>178</sup>

Some late Muslim theologians interpret the phenomenon of the Christian councils, and the fierce differences between the Christian sects, who habitually exchanged anathemas against each other, as a sign that Christianity, from their point of view, was an entirely different religion from the original one revealed to Jesus Christ.<sup>179</sup> Taking different and a softer approach, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī alluded to the council of Nicaea, supposing that the 318 attendances were influenced by the “kings of Rum’s philosophers (sic)” and they misunderstood some problematic verses in the Bible, which are, on his count, 10 compared to 20,000 verses all confirming the humanity of Christ.<sup>180</sup>

Similarly, the sharp conflict between Christian sects, which appeared clearly in the church’s councils, was in Muslims’ eyes enough to discredit Christianity.<sup>181</sup> Evidently, this issue played an important part in the polemic within the Arab community. When some Muslim theologians alluded to the deep controversies

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<sup>176</sup> - Matthew, 18:18.

<sup>177</sup> -Matthew, 5: 17-19. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, pp.22-23. Again he erroneously attributes the text to chapter four of Matthew.

<sup>178</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, II, p.22.

<sup>179</sup> -Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya devoted one chapter to expose the role of the Christian councils in the formation or deformation of Christianity. He says, “These ten councils were attended by around 14,000 bishops, patriarchs and monks. All of them anathematised each other. So their religion stands on the anathemas, by the witnesses of some of them against others, and all of them anathematised and have been anathematised”, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, pp. 313-339.

<sup>180</sup> -‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *al-radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 138.

<sup>181</sup> -Al-Jāhiz, *al-radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 22; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-ḥayāra*, pp. 338-339.

between Christian sects, in response a number of Christian Arab writers devoted treatises to dismantling these Muslim claims.<sup>182</sup>

### Monasticism

Although the Qur'ān and some Muslim sources evince a certain degree of admiration of Christian monks and their ascetic life, and often describe pious Muslims as monks,<sup>183</sup> Muslim apologists either refuted the monasticism or accused monks and nuns of misconduct. Al-Jāhiz says, "If a certain Christian was lazy... reluctant to work (he) became a monk and wore the wool, inasmuch as he was sure that whenever he wears this uniform and declares his intension, all the wealthy ones have to subsidize him".<sup>184</sup> This notion is quoted by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār who wonders how these monks have become very rich when they began their monastic life with no property at all.<sup>185</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, presumably adopted the same attitude, and belittled the life of monks comparing them with Indians and people of other nations, who in his view are more ascetic.<sup>186</sup>

Niketas of Byzantium was apparently aware of the Qur'ānic criticism against the monks,<sup>187</sup> though he did not discuss monasticism or the Islamic attitude towards it. Paul of Antioch the Melkite writer, in contrast, used other verses in the Qur'ān which praise monks as a proof of the rightness of Christianity.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> - 'Alī b. Dāwud al-Arfādi, 'le livre de l'unanimité de la foi de 'Alī ibn Dāwud al-Arfādi' ed. and French trans. G. Tropeau, *Études sur le christianisme arabe au Moyen Age*, Variorum (London 1995) N. XIII, (Arabic text and French translation)

<sup>183</sup> - Qur'ān 5:82; Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, II, p. 325; Abū Yūsuf, Ya'qūb, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 20; I Ibn Qutayba, *Uūm al-akhbār*, 2, p. 368; al-Nasyby, (Elias of Nisbis) 'Entretiens avec le visir Ibn 'Aly al-Maghribi sur l'unité et la trinité' ed. and trans. S. K Samir, *Islamochristiana* 5 (1979). In this text, the Muslim vizier allegedly told his Christian interlocutor, that he was cured of his illness by the blessing of some simple food in a monastery. On the general Muslim attitude towards monasticism, see S. Sviri, 'wa-rahbābāniyyatan ibtada'ūhā: an analysis of traditions concerning the origin and evaluation of the Christian monasticism' *JASI* 13 (1990) pp. 195-208; E. Beck 'Das Christliche Mönchtum im Koran', *SO* 13 (1946) 3-29

<sup>184</sup> - Al-Jāhiz, *al-Hayawān*, 1, p. 103.

<sup>185</sup> - Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, p. 175, 208.

<sup>186</sup> - Ibn Ḥazm, *al-fiṣal*, I, pp. 74-75.

<sup>187</sup> - Niketas of Byzantium, *Refut.*, col. 740<sub>A</sub>.

<sup>188</sup> - Paul de Antioche, p. 66.

In sum, the Byzantine-Muslim polemic has its own peculiarities, together with some unique features. On the major issues of the Christian-Muslim polemic, such as the Trinity or nature of Christ, Byzantine polemic is not singled out this debate. But there are some issues which appear mainly in Byzantine polemic, such as Jihad, life and the personality of Muḥammad, which were taboo subjects for the Christian Arab apologists. Generally, Byzantine polemic is characterised by harsh language against Islam and its prophet. This heralded a similar anti Islamic polemic, which arose in Western Europe, following the Byzantines in their vehement language against Islam.

## Conclusion

The Muslim-Byzantine struggle was not only a military clash or series of battles between two medieval rivals. It was a military, intellectual and religious confrontation between the greatest powers and the key players in the history of the eastern Mediterranean. The relations, peaceful or hostile, and cross-influences between these two cultures never eased at any time. Surprisingly, in spite of these opportunities of contacts, the acquaintanceship on each side with the other's internal affairs seems disappointingly slender. This may appear puzzling, but nevertheless, it has a great deal of truth, at least from the religious point of view.

Although the Byzantine-Muslim polemic was a small portion of the Muslim-Christian polemic as a whole it has its unique and peculiar features, some of which were directly related to the actual military conflict on the borders. Broadly speaking, the overwhelming majority of the Byzantine polemical texts were characterised deeply by certain special characteristics. The most important of all is the problem of the authenticity of these works, inasmuch as almost all of them are more or less obscure and raise chronological problems as to their contents. Hardly ever do we find the names of their supposed interlocutors, or any contemporary rulers, or chronological hints. Niketas of Byzantium, Evode, Bartholomew of Edessa, almost nothing is known about them or their lives. Those who are relatively well-known such as Theodore Abū Qurrah, have to have their biographies reconstructed from tiny fragments in different sources. Even with the works of well-known authors, such as John of Damascus and Arethas of Caesarea, authenticity is still doubtful matter.

Although almost all of the Byzantine treatises against Islam, are written in the same style, even employing the same vocabulary and the same phraseology,

Byzantine polemicists had one lineal connection between them, which extended from John of Damascus till the emperor Manuel II Paliologos. They all follow the same line, and even the same make mistakes in their apologies. Perhaps the only exception is Niketas of Byzantium, whose works illustrate a solid and wide comprehension of Islam. Even so, this uniqueness, ironically, may undermine the authenticity of his work, or at least the widely accepted theories, which put him in the ninth or tenth century.

Byzantine polemic as well as the Melkite polemic are mostly aimed at a simple-minded Christian reader, (or listener) full of hatred of Islam and poorly acquainted with Islamic dogmas. Even those texts which allegedly address a certain Muslim foe, could hardly be accepted as a real text directed genuinely to any Muslim whatsoever. The vehement language of Arethas and the highly offensive vocabularies of Niketas of Byzantium are certainly far from the real and mostly irenic letters exchanged between Muslims and Byzantines, of which we have several examples from contemporary sources,<sup>1</sup> which were obviously characterised by much considerable, delicate and diplomatic language. The specific nature of the polemic indicates one of its essential aims, that is to say, to offer a spiritual protection to the simple-minded people who were confused by the propaganda or debates with the other side. Islamic polemic was no exception, as the majority of works were aimed mostly at a parallel Muslim reader, with similar aims in mind.

While Muslim thinkers, especially al-Mu'tazilah, tended to use more rational arguments, and were relatively less dependent on Qur'anic references, the Christian apologists, Byzantines and Melkites, draw heavily on the Bible, as the final and unquestionable word, to prove or disprove their foes' arguments. For the Muslim

interlocutor, it was crucial for him to ask his Christian opponent to answer with an explanation “not only from your Scripture but also from universally acknowledged ideas”.<sup>2</sup> While the Byzantine thinker would reply “in conformity with the holy gospel and the reason”.<sup>3</sup> This may look like a mere generalisation, but it did reflect a general phenomenon in the Byzantine-Muslim polemic.

It is notable that, in Byzantine-Muslim polemic, while the Byzantines entirely denied any kind of authenticity for the Qur’ān as a divine book, most of the Muslim thinkers had a different approach to the Bible. As for the Old Testament, it seems that it was generally accepted, yet with some scepticism and accusations of *taḥrīf* (alterations) against the Jewish Rabbis. Most of the Muslim theologians tended to use the Old Testament in their arguments against Christians, either to prove the message and prophethood of Muḥammad or to show that the Christians had gone astray from the Bible itself, or to expose some examples of the lives of the ancient prophets who were accepted and venerated by the Christians to clarify some aspects of the life of Muḥammad, such as his polygamy or his personal participation in the war against his enemies. There are still more citations and stories from the Bible which were employed by the Muslim theologians. These include, the divinity of Jesus, his miracles and similar ones achieved by the ancient prophets, and most controversial, the prophecies on Muḥammad in the Old Testament.

To sum up, Byzantine-Muslim polemic in some ways reflected various intellectual and religious features of both worlds. The Byzantine component was extremely aggressive and closely fought with only scant attention to establishing

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<sup>1</sup> - Compare for examples the letters of the patriarch Nicholas I, al-Ikhshīd, the caliph Harūn al-Rāshīd, and the letter to the Muslim caliph of Spain.

<sup>2</sup> - Theodore Abū Qurrah, Opus. 22, PG 97, cols. 1552-1553, ed with parallel German translation: *Schriften zum Islam*, p. 108<sub>10</sub>.

<sup>3</sup> - J. Pelikan, *The spirit of eastern Christendom*, p. 243.

genuine dialogue or attempting to convert the foe. It indicates more or less the nature of Byzantine society, its feeling of isolation and constant fear of its neighbours.

Muslim polemic, rich, vivid and varied, certainly reflects the multicoloured character of the Islamic cultural milieu. The contributions of the Muslim thinkers in the polemic against Byzantium come from almost all the intellectual and religious currents in the Muslim world. We have works from the Orthodox fundamental Muslims (Ahl al-Sunnah)<sup>4</sup>, who draw heavily on the Qurā'nic text, apply a literary explanation to its verses, and defend the miracles of Muḥammad and other Muslim saints; while the free thinkers of al-Mu'tazilah school adopt a different and more rational attitude towards Christianity. They are generally less aggressive, tending to use more rational arguments, instead of simply quoting the Qur'ān. Remarkably, even some of the thinkers who were accused of heresy contributed substantially to the Muslim polemic against Christianity<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore we have also some Shiite theologians who made considerable contributions in Christian-Muslim polemic, yet their writings are outside the scope of this present work.<sup>6</sup>

One may hypothesise that the Muslim polemic came as a reply to internal as well as external factors. It seems, however, that the internal waves of heretics and the struggle between the Muslim intellectual and fiqhi schools, substantially fastened the Muslim polemic tradition, while the role of Byzantine polemic as a provocateur of the Muslim seems relatively less influential on the growing Muslim theology. Nevertheless, Byzantine polemic played a unique role in the wider context of Muslim-Christian dialogue. It offered a vehement foe which was able and free to address any issues, whatever their sensitivity and impact on the Muslims, such as the personality

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<sup>4</sup> - Among them: al-Baqlānī, al-Ash'arī, Ibn Ḥazm and al-Māturīdī.

<sup>5</sup> - Such as Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq.

and life of their prophet as well as Muslim moral life in general,<sup>7</sup> while the Christian Arabs were restricted by heavy taboos in their Muslim dominated milieu. Accordingly, there had to be some Muslim replies and challenges to such vehement polemic.

In a word, on both sides the polemicists were mostly shouting in separate valleys, only the echoes were heard on the other side, except a few times when the barriers were broken and both sides came face to face in a direct debate. On those few occasions, it was the will of the sovereigns and political circumstances were which behind the direct clashes.

At the same time, the nature and length of the military struggle, which witnessed changes of control over vast lands on both sides of the borders, brought a large number of civilian populations under the yoke of their enemies. These mostly ill-fated civilians suffered not only in their lives and propriety but also in their religion, sacred places and objects, holy books and their religious freedom. Their destiny led them in most cases either to the flourishing slave markets or to forced conversion and assimilation within a new and different society.

As the war lasted for centuries, a large number of people were captured either in direct fighting or by any other means. Tens of thousands of people, soldiers or civilians reportedly crossed the borders either as captured prisoners of war, or freed ones, all carrying with them a bitter experience and some traces of cultural and religious influences, as well as news and narratives of their enemies' lands.

In this thesis some light has been shed on the religious life of the prisoners of war in the Byzantine-Muslim struggle. Although the lives of those prisoners of war

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<sup>6</sup> - For instance, al-Imām Turjumān al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim (d. 860 A.D./ 245 A.H.). See Di Matteo, 'Confutazione contro I cristiani dello zaydita al-Qāsim b.Ibrāhīm' *RSO* 9 (1922) 301-364 (Arabic text 332-464)



have been examined in new and useful studies in Arabic and Western languages, there are two groups of prisoners of war who have had almost had no attention from modern researchers. These two groups are slave girls and children; the latter were mostly castrated (in Byzantium) and lived their lives as eunuchs on both sides. This dissertation has traced and examined the lives of these two groups in both Byzantine and some relatively unknown (or unused) Muslim sources.<sup>8</sup>

The eunuchs played a hidden role in the relations between Byzantium and the Muslims. This thesis shows the systematic Byzantine policy of capturing and transporting thousands of Muslims children to its territory. These children were later castrated *en masse*, and from this point they disappeared into the mists of history. Apart from Samoans, whose story of escape brings him to the forefront of our knowledge, the thousands of other eunuchs simply vanish. Nevertheless, using some unique allusions in the Muslim sources, it emerges that some of these eunuchs escaped to Muslim lands and thereafter determined to take revenge against Byzantium. While the same sources point to some Muslim raids which specifically targeted monasteries and churches only to capture eunuchs either to free those of Muslims origin or simply to capture whomever they could found and use them in the Muslim harems, as harmless and trustworthy guards.

As for the Byzantine slave girls, it seems that, despite their large numbers, they enjoyed almost no influence on Byzantine-Muslim relations, yet we have some examples of women who married caliphs or emirs; however the narratives of their role and lives are utterly obscure and indistinct. The only exception, which may be cited here is the Melkite girl who married the Faṭimīd caliph al-'Azīz. She and her

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<sup>7</sup> - This role was undertaken by Latin theologians from the eleventh century onwards.

<sup>8</sup> - Although both al-Jāḥiẓ and his fellow Mu'tazlī al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, are relatively well known among Western scholars of theology and some of their works and treatises have been translated into

family seem to have had some influence on the state and its attitude towards Christians, mainly the Melkites, who enjoyed, for the first time in centuries, some taste of their lost power, when the Byzantine imperial forces were their support. Unfortunately, almost nothing is known about the life of captured Muslim women in Byzantium.

There are still some issues to be addressed by future researchers. The most important is to re-examine individual and obscure works and their mostly unknown authors, not just from a translation into a modern language, but by studying each author and his treatise within their own historical and theological context.<sup>9</sup> As I have shown in this thesis, some of the modern studies seem to have taken the sources at their face value, though the authenticity of these works clearly appears doubtful. Consequently, each text needs to be re-examined philologically, and at the same time compared with other contemporary sources.

There are also several Muslim theological works still widely unknown in the West in spite of their utmost importance to the study of Byzantine-Muslim relations. I have tried to use and illustrate the importance of these sources, but editing or translating them are beyond scope and length of this thesis.

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modern European languages, they have both been almost ignored by Western Byzantinists, and some of their important works are still in Arabic.

<sup>9</sup> - A new series had been started recently in Germany under the supervision of R. Geli and A. Khoury, under the name of *Corpus Islamo-Christianum*, of which some volumes have appeared with a new edition and a parallel German translation, and some comments on the authors and their lives. To my knowledge, so far 4 Byzantine works, 5 Latin ones and one Christian Arab, are published.

## Appendix

### The narrative of al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār on the Muslim prisoners.<sup>10</sup>

"ومن سيرتهم أن النساء الديرانيات العابدات ومن انقطع إلي البيع والعبادة، يطفن علي العزاب والرهبان، ويخرجن إلى الحصون التي فيها الرجال العزاب يبيحون لهم<sup>11</sup> أنفسهم ابتغاء وجه الله والدار الآخرة والرحمة بالعزاب، ومن فعل هذا منهم كان عندهم<sup>12</sup> مشكوراً محموداً علي هذا الفعل ويُدعا لها<sup>13</sup>، ويقال لها: لا ينسى لك المسيح هذه الرأفة والرحمة.

وعندهم انه لا يحل للرجل اكثر من امرأة واحدة، ولا يحل له أن يتسرى ولا يطأ بملك اليمين، فإن صادق امرأة أو خادمة لم يكن بذلك بأس ولا عار، وهذا مشهور ببلاد الروم كشهرة الزنى.

ولقد تحدث مصبح الطائي، و أبو عبد الله الحسين بن الصقر، و عبد الرحمن صاحب ابن الزيات وغيرهم من الغزاة، وممن أقام بالقسطنطينية السنين الكثيرة في الأسر وغير الأسر، فإنهم لطول الشقاء وعدم من بعثت المسلمين في فداء أو غزو، اظهروا النصرانية تقية، وانتشروا بينهم، واختلطوا بهم.

فحدث من حدث منهم بعض من تنصر من الشجعان بعد الشدة وطول الشقاء، قال: فأعطاني الملك وأجزل وقال لخدمه وأعوانه: انظروا هؤلاء المنتصرة نساء من ذوى اليسار يتزوجون بهن لتحسن أحوالهم، فقال رجل منهم: فلانة قد مات أبوها، ولها ضيعة ومواش وأموال كثيرة نزوجها بهذا، وأشار إليّ، فزوجوني بها. فإذا هناك جمال ومال كثير فأقمت معها مسروراً ثم ضرب الملك بعثا على جماعة أنا منهم ليخرج إلى مكان فيه زرع مستحصد يخاف عليه العدو أن يمنعهم منه، ويكون مقامنا أربعين يوماً، ثم يأتي بعدنا عسكر يقوم مقامنا ونرجع إلى أهلنا.

فخرجنا وأقمنا هذه المدة، ثم جاء العسكر فسألت بعض الواردين عن أهلي ومنزلي، فقال لي: قد تزوجت امرأتك بعد خروجك، فأستثبت من ذلك جيداً ممن ورد فأخبرت بهذا، (ص 172) فأخذني ما أقامني وأقعدني؛ فلما رجعت إلى البلد عدلت عن منزلي ونزلت سوق الدواب، فسأل أهلي عن الواردين من أهل عسكرنا فأخبروهم بسلامتي وورودي، فتعرفوا مكاني فإذا أم امرأتي قد جاءتني ومعها موكب عظيم من نساء الجيران عليهن البزة الفاخرة والحلي، فقالت لي حماتي: ما عدلك عن منزلك وأهلك ونزلت هاهنا ونحن نتعرف أخبارك

<sup>10</sup> - Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīr dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, I, pp. 170-172.

<sup>11</sup> - لهم

<sup>12</sup> - عندهم

ونشأتك، فقلت وما أصنع بامرأة غبت عنها فتزوجت بعدي، أنا عليّ أن ادخل علي الملك واكسر بحضرته سيفي وأقطع زناري وأعرفه ما جري عليّ. فقلت لي أخطأ من قال هذا، ما تزوجت امرأتك وكيف تتزوج رومية بزوجين، إنما ذلك صديقها، لما غبت عنها جاء ونزل عندها. فلما علمنا بقدمك حمل فراشه وانصرف، واستشهدت بأولئك النسوة والجيران، فشهدن أنه ليس بزواج وإنما هو صديقها، وإذا ليس عندهم أن هذا بأسا وعارا. ثم أتيت حماتي تقول لي: قم إلى بيتك فانظر إلى المكنوز والنبيد وما خلفته تجده لم ينقص بل هو محفوظ موفر، وإذا هي تبشرني [فيما إذا] أن صديق زوجتي قد كفاني منونتها في غيبي وتسرني بهذا أو تمن به عليّ. وقال أولئك النساء ومن حليلات وأزواج كبار الناس، قم عفاك الله إلى بيتك، فما ها هنا شيء يُكره ولا يُنكر، فممت وحملت أنقالي وصرت إلى منزلي وأنا مقيم على امرأتي، وما أجد شيئا، وزالت الغيرة. ثم قال يا أبا الفتح: ما يدخل أحد بلاد الروم إلا وقد طابت نفسه باتخاذ زوجته الأصدقاء، وزال عما كان عليه وامحت الغيرة من قلبه، وزالت الحمية من نفسه، وزال عن الحمية وما كان عليه وهو مسلم"

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(ص 181) فلو قال لكم قائل وأنتم أيضا أول أمركم مثل آخره، إذ ليس في زمانكم من معه معجزة ولا

آية، فأولكم هذه سبيله ما كان يكون جوابكم؟

قيل له: لا سؤال علينا في هذا، لأننا نمنع أن يكون مع أحد بعد نبينا آية أو معجزة، وما ندعي أنه آية ومعجزة فهو ما علمه كل من سمع الأخبار، وهو هذا القرآن وما جاء مجيء القرآن، ونقول: لا حجة علي الخلق إلا رسول الله ﷺ وحده، فعرفت الفصل بيننا وبين من ذكرنا. (ص 182). وجواب آخر، وهو أن كل من سمع أخبار النبي عليه السلام فمن صدقه أو كذبه يعلم باضطرار أنه كان يدعي النبوة، و يدعي أن معه آيات ودلالات ومعجزات. فإن قال النصارى: نحن أولنا المسيح وهو سلفنا، وأنتم تقولون أن معه آيات ومعجزات، فكيف قلتم أن أولنا مثل آخرنا؟

قيل لهم: ومن سلم لكم أن المسيح عليه السلام سلفكم، ونحن فقد دفعناكم عن هذا، وبيننا أنكم خالفتم المسيح عليه السلام في أصوله وفروعه، ونقضتم عهوده، وعطلتم وصاياه بيانا لا يمكنكم دفعه، ونحن فيما علمنا أن المسيح نبيّ وأنه قد كان معه آيات ومعجزات [ لا ] بقولكم، ولا بنقلكم، ولا بدعواكم، وإنما علمنا ذلك بقول نبينا صلي الله عليه وسلم، ولكن ادعيتم أن هذه الأمم ما أجابت إلي النصرانية إلا بالآيات والمعجزات التي ظهرت علي بولص وجورجس وأبا مرقس، ودونتم ذلك في كتبكم كما دونته المنانية والمجوس وغيرهم، وادعيتم ذلك في كل زمان،

والناس معكم ويشاهدونكم فلا يرون لذلك أصلاً ولا أثراً، ولا يرون إلا السيف والقهر والعسف وإن أول هذا المر ما كان إلا بالسيف والقهر كما بيّنا، وهو قائم باق مازال ولا حال بل زاد، ونحن قد وجدناكم نزلتم علي أهل المصيصة، وعين زربة، وجزيرة كريت، وجزيرة قبرص، وجزيرة أرواد، (ص 183) والثغور الشامية، والثغور الجزرية، وثغور أرمينية، وأذربيجان، وما يكثر إحصاؤه، وما قد قدره أهل الخبرة إلي هذه الغاية، ومقداره ألف فرسخ منائر، وعمارته متصلة ومقدار السبي والأسر نحو عشرين ألف إنسان، لا يقرون علي الإسلام، بل يُدخلون في النصرانية كرهاً، بالرغبة والرغبة، وكذا من دخل من البرغر والبرجان كله بالإكراه والسيف، وإن طالت مدته، وتتاسي الناس كيف جري ذلك.

وإدعيتهم أن هؤلاء دخلوا في النصرانية بالآيات والمعجزات، وأن البطريرك وافى من بلاد الروم، فنزل وجنده وعليه الجوذبا والكتين والودار وعلي رأسه القبع وفي يده الكرار، فأقام موتاهم من المقابر، فقاموا بأسرهم من تلقاء أنفسهم وصاروا إلي بلاد الروم. ووافى ميخائيل الراهب إلي أهل المصيصة فقلب سيحون زيتاً، وجعل اغنامهم كلها خيلاً، فقاموا كلهم من تلقاء أنفسهم فقبلوا الصليب، وصاروا إلي بلاد الروم. وكذا أهل سميصاط وحصن منصور، فليس عندهم في الكذب والبهت شيء، وهم قوم يكذب لهم رؤسائهم فيقبلون ذلك الكذب عنهم، وقلّ مصر من هذه الأمصار وثغر من هذه الثغور إلا وقد ترددت عليه ملوك الروم السنين الكثيرة، ونزلوا عليه الأعوام المتوالية، ورعوا زروعهم وحصروهم ومنعواهم الأتوات، حتى أكلوا الكلاب والسنائير والميتة، وقتلهم جوعاً وعطشاً، وقتلوا مقاتلتهم، وسبوا ذريتهم، وقادوهم بالسلاسل والحبال، وأنزلوا بهم من المكاره ما يطول شرحه، وكذا أمرهم من أوله إلي آخره. وليس سيف حُمل بباطل في جميع الأزمان مثل سيف النصرانية كما قد بينا ذلك.

### **The English translation:**

In their conduct, the pious nuns who live in convents and devote themselves to worship go to single men and monks, as well as to the castles, where single men are staying, and allow themselves to be used for the sake of God, the eternal abode and compassion for these single men. Whoever does this, they appreciate and pray for, and they say to her, "Jesus will not forget this mercy and piety on your part!"

In their lands, a man is not allowed more than one woman. It is not legitimate for him to have concubines or women as his slaves, but if he befriends a woman or a servant, he will not be in disgrace or criticised, and this is well known in Rūm, similar to the adultery.

Muṣbaḥ al-Ṭā'i, Abū 'Abd Allah al-Iḥusayn b. al-Ṣaqr, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sāhib b. al-Zayāt, and others of Ghazis, who stayed in Constantinople for several years in captivity or for other reasons, narrated that: when their ordeal was extended and there was no exchange of Muslim prisoners or invasions, they pretended to convert to Christianity, lived with the Byzantines and mixed with them.

Some of those brave ones who were baptized after long distress said: 'the king gave me generously, and ordered his assistants and servants to find some rich women to marry the new Christians, so their conditions would be improved.' A man among officials of the court said, 'So-and-so, her father died and she has a country estate, livestock and a lot of money; let us marry her to this man' and signalled to me, therefore I married her, and she was a beautiful and had lot of money so I stayed happily with her.

The king chose a group to go for on expedition and I was one of them, to protect a place in which there was a crop to be reaped soon, for fear that the enemy

would prevent them from harvesting it. We were requested to stay for forty days, and then another group would replace us while we returned to our families. So we went and stayed for a time till the new group came. I asked some of them about my wife; they said 'Your wife married after you left'. I made quite certain of this from the new arrivals, and they all told me the same (p. 172). I have been desperate and quite overwhelmed.<sup>14</sup>

When I returned to the city, I avoided my house and stayed in the cattle' market. My wife asked the other arrivals about me, they told her about my return and that I was safe, so she discovered where I was.

My mother-in-law came to me in a fine procession of the neighbouring women, wearing jewellery and beautiful clothes. My mother-in-law asked me 'Why did you avoid your house and your family and stay away? We are missing you and trying to find what happened to you'. I asked her 'What can I do with a woman who, I left (for a while) and she got married? I will see the king and in his presence I will break my sword, cut my belt and tell him everything that has happened to me'.

'You are mistaken!' She said. 'Who told you that? Your wife did not marry. How could a Byzantine (Rūmi woman) marry two men? That was her friend. When you left, he came and stayed with her. But once we knew you are coming he took away his bed and left'. She asked the other women and neighbours to confirm what she said. They confirmed that he was not a husband, just was a friend, and no misconduct was involved. Then my mother-in-law came and said 'Go back home and see what you have stored up and wine and everything you left still there, not touched but still kept well', as if she was telling me good news, that my wife's friend should

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<sup>14</sup> - The literal translation "and something took me up and down"

have saved me the cost of providing for her in my absence. Does she think is pleasing me or doing me a favour by this?

All those women, who are the wives of distinguished men, said 'Go back to your house, may God give you health. Nothing unusual or unpleasant has happened. So I got up, picked up my things, went home, and stayed with my wife without any bad feeling and the jealousy had gone.

So, O Aba al-Faḥ, whoever enters the Rūm lands, will not mind if his wife has friends; he will lose his true nature; give up jealousy, his heart and will lose the enthusiasm which he had when he was a Muslim<sup>15</sup>.

.....

(p. 181) If someone asked you, 'You also, the first of your matter (religion) is similar to its end, inasmuch as there no one in your time has performed miracles, so your starting point (i.e. Muḥammad) is similar'. What will your answer be?

We answered: There is no problem to us in this issue, because we do not believe in any miracles of anyone after the prophet, and what we do claim as a miracle is known to every one who has heard of it. That is the Qur'ān and what is similar, and we say 'There is no testimony from people (Muslims), except what is to do with Muḥammad peace be upon him. So you know the difference between what you mean and what we mean. (p. 182)

Another answer: that every one who has heard the news of the prophet, peace be upon him, whoever believed or disbelieved him *a fortiori* knows that he (Muḥammad) claimed to be a prophet, and that he has miracles and proofs. If the Christians said, 'Our first was Christ, and you accept his miracles', how can you say our first is similar to our last?

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<sup>15</sup> - Al-Qādi 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīḥ dala'il al-nubuwah*, I, pp. 171-172.



It may say to them; who agreed that Christ (peace be upon him) was your first? We refuted your claims on this, and elucidated that you dissented from Christ in his principles and subdivisions, recanted his covenants, and broke his precepts in a way which you cannot deny. We know that Christ is a prophet and he has preformed miracles, that [not] through your narratives, nor your writings, nor your claims, but from the sayings of our prophet (peace be upon him).

You claimed that these nations accepted Christianity only through the miracles of Paul, Jirjis [George] and apa Murqus (mark) and others like them. You recorded that in your books just like al-Mināniah (Manichaeism ?), the Magi and others. You claim this all the time, and people watch you, but they do not see any traces or origins of this. They see only the sword, tyranny and compulsion, and the first of this matter (Christianity) existed only through sword and coercion, as we have explained. And that is still true, never eased or altered, but has even increased.

We found that you targeted the people of Maṣīṣah, 'ayn Zarah, the island of Crete, Cyprus, Arwād, al-thughūr al-shamyah, al-thughūr al-Jazrīah, thughūr of Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and what the experts estimated today as one thousand *Farsakh* (leagues) of continuously inhabitant lands and minarets. The number of captives was twenty million, who were not allowed to keep their faith, but were forced to convert to Christianity, by threats or promises ... And you claimed that these people embraced Christianity by a miracle, and the *παρῆ* came from the Rūm with his soldiers wearing Juzba, Katayn (flax ?) and al-widār<sup>16</sup>, a hat on his head and in his hand al-kirār.<sup>17</sup> He resurrected the dead from the tombs so they all rose up and walked towards the Rūm lands. Michael the monk came to the people of al-Maṣīṣah,

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<sup>16</sup> - Several Arabic dictionaries do not have clear and direct meanings of these words; presumably they are some distortion of original Greek words.

<sup>17</sup> - The plural of al-Kurt, a rope of palm leaves. Al-kirār is a piece of material to stand on for prayer. Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, (Beirut 1987)

turned Sayhūn<sup>18</sup> into oil, and all their sheep into horses; therefore they all came, kissed the cross and left for the Rūm lands, and so did the people of Şmişaṭ, and İlişn Mansūr.

These people (the Byzantines? Or the Christians Arabs?) have no problem with laying or slander, as they accept the lies of their chiefs.

There was no Maşr (country) of these countries and thughūr had not been targeted by kings of the Rūm for many years; they Byzantines reaped their crops, besieged and starved them, they even had to eat dogs, dead and cats. They killed them with thirst and hunger, slaughtered their fighters, captured their offspring and led them in chains and robes. They imposed on them tribulations which would take too long to repeat. So this is their matter from the start till the end. There is no sword was carried inequitably except the Christian one, as we have explained.

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<sup>18</sup> - This is a clear mistake. The river which passes by al-Maşīṣah is Pyramus.

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<sup>1</sup> - Although I have followed the standards of the Encyclopaedia of Islam in transliteration the Arabic names and Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium system in writing the Greek names, here I have retained the forms of the names used by the editors, publishers and translators.

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